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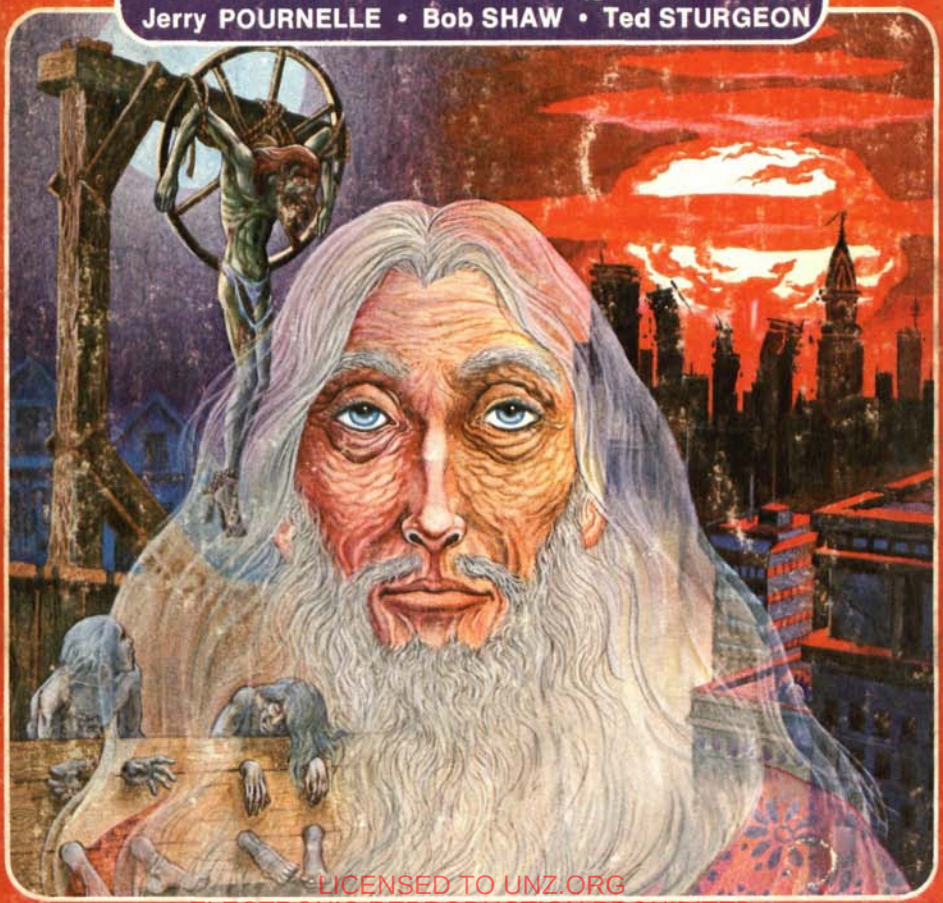

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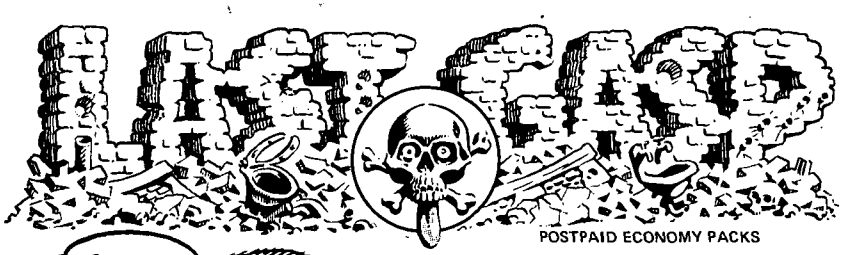

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THE GIFT OF GARIGOLLI, Fred Pohl & C. M. Kornbluth **96**

Rather than describe this story (that it is a genuine, previously unpublished Pohl/Kornbluth collaboration should be description enough!) I am taking this opportunity to congratulate Fred on being elected President of the Science Fiction Writers of America.

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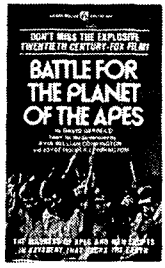

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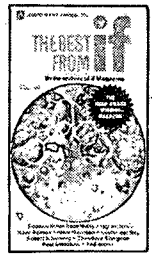

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FORUM

A CYCLICAL THEORY OF SCIENCE FICTION

POUL ANDERSON

THERE is a saying that those who do not learn history are condemned to repeat it. Like most aphorisms, this is a pithy oversimplification. For instance, it implies that some kind of linear progress, however defined, is possible and even desirable in every field of human life. Still, it would seem to apply pretty well to the sciences and the arts. If we aren't familiar with past achievements, won't we endlessly repeat them instead of going on to something new?

The art of science fiction appears at first glance to be an especially appropriate case. A literary critic would probably say that, while the novel or short story which deals with character and little else can always be written, science fiction must keep on presenting new ideas, new excitements, or cease to be viable. He would explain that merely telling essentially the same old space opera—or whatever—over and over again cannot be justified. Therefore we must know what has already been done, and pioneer elsewhere.

I wish to register disagreement with this hypothetical gentleman. Of course innovation is important, and the main object of the present essay will be to study it as a phenomenon. But as a practical matter, it is not a *sine qua non* of survival. Many readers like familiar tales in only slightly changed guises. Consider such genres as the Western and the Gothic. In my heretical opinion, the kind of "mainstream" which concentrates on sensitive Manhattan intellectuals or Southern decadents is equally played out; yet it continues

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to have an audience. I think literature as a whole is heading back toward story telling—a development by no means incompatible with characterization and other esthetic values. But our concern here will simply be with the development of science fiction.

One thing which we long-time devotees of sf often overlook is that the traditional themes are *not* old hat to the newcomer. And the majority of readers at any given time are more or less new; not many stick around for the rest of their lives, eagerly devouring all the science fiction they can lay hands on. Publishers would be well advised to reissue successful books every five or ten years, at least until events in the real world have hopelessly dated them. To compensate for that last factor we need a steady supply of fresh treatments of standard ideas.

This is not, repeat not, to say that such stories are necessarily hackwork. They can be bright, even brilliant. For example, Kurt Vonnegut's work is deservedly popular, but except for *The Sirens of Titan* he has given us no innovations; nor is there any reason why he should. Sterling Lanier's *Hiero's Journey* recently made the distant post-Armageddon future once again an interesting place to visit. In fantasy, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* "simply" used elements so traditional that some are of prehistoric origin.

Any literature needs to maintain its archetypes. This is not enough for its vitality, of course. The maintenance must be done well. As a rule, it is done best in periods when novelty is also present, when writers are trying things which their field has never quite seen before. And we do need the long-time rather than the casual reader to know whether or not this is the case at any particular time.

FROM such a viewpoint, I would like first to make the not very surprising suggestion that science fiction has had epochs of stimulating creativity, alternating with comparatively dull and repetitious ones. Second, I would like to make the perhaps more interesting suggestion that, at least in the past half century, this alternation has followed a pretty definite twelve-year cycle. Finally we'll try to peer into the future of futuristic fiction.

Years ago I remarked that the high points, at least in America, have occurred just about when the United States got involved in wars, and added a facetious "Gung ho!" But somebody later pointed out that this merely means we get embroiled at lot. And anyway, to make it come out right requires fudging the dates a bit.

Nevertheless, a cycle of sorts does exist, and it makes sense that one should. After all, new people break new ground; a period naturally follows wherein that which they

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have opened up is explored and exploited more fully; at last it becomes assimilated, mere routine, and either the field goes stale or some virgin territory is annexed to it. This has been as true of the mystery as of the science fiction story. After Naomi Mitchison left it, the historical didn't fare so well, until the likes of Mary Renault revitalized it by reintroducing elements of archeology, depth psychology, and sheer fine writing. (It seems to me that the "mainstream" has been in the doldrums for a long while, barring the rare law-unto-themselves geniuses like Alexander Solzhenitsyn, but that a few writers are now bringing in some energizing unconventionalities. However, let's just stay with the history of science fiction.)

I CAN'T show any periodicity for the first-generation giants, Verne and a few contemporaries, nor for the second-generation giants, Wells and a few contemporaries. And it doesn't seem to occur in languages other than English, either. Twentieth-century Continental writers such as Karel Capek, Francis Carsac, Ivan Efremov, Herbert Franke, Charles Henneberg, and Johannes V. Jensen—not to mention non-Europeans like Jorge Luis Borges—have been of the greatest importance, but presumably insufficient in numbers for statistics to affect them. We shall have to confine ourselves to the Anglo-Americans, and begin at 1926, when Hugo Gernsback started the first genre magazine.

For better or for worse, this event was crucial. It marked off science fiction as a category—which in my opinion was bad—but it also created a steady if small demand for it—which at least enabled writers to develop various concepts that have become basic and are today diffused through the whole public consciousness. Quite likely, too, the existence of a "ghetto" market brought about the twelve-year cycle I intend to discuss. Why the period should have that approximate value, I can't say. Sunspots, anyone? What's necessary is to show that it exists.

From *Amazing Stories* and its imitators came the third-generation giants, such as John Campbell in his two aspects, Edmond Hamilton, Murray Leinster, E. E. Smith, Stanley Weinbaum, and Jack Williamson. Their work was seminal. A great deal of what we are doing to this day derives straight from ideas they evolved: exploration of all space and time, the danger as well as the promise of high-level technology, believable extraterrestrial environments and nonhuman intelligences, future societies unlike any in the past, psionics, and on and on. It is good that a few of these people are still around, still contributing and still developing in their own careers. This will be part of the point I wish to make.

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They did not come on the scene immediately in 1926. Their individual excellences appeared gradually. Thus, both Weinbaum and "Don A. Stuart" (Campbell in his poetic rather than his superscientific mood) were first published in 1934. And they were almost too few to constitute a school, in a mass of lesser writers who were content to grind out standardized pulp. Therefore this first beat of the rhythm is less clearly defined than those which follow. We can only say that, by and large, toward the end of the first cycle good stories were again rare.

BUT THEN in 1938 John Campbell took the helm of *Astounding*. What happened in the next few years is common knowledge—how he rapidly built a stable of outstanding creators who took off in any number of fresh directions—in competitor magazines as well as in his own.

Some of them came from the earlier era. As for the rest, an incomplete list is ample commentary: Isaac Asimov, Alfred Bester, James Blish, A. Bertram Chandler, Hal Clement, L. Sprague de Camp, Lester del Rey, Robert Heinlein, Malcolm Jameson, Henry Kuttner, Fritz Leiber, Catherine L. Moore, Frederik Pohl (in those days, mainly as a bright rival editor), Ross Rocklynne, Eric Frank Russell, Clifford D. Simak, Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. van Vogt.

Not all of them hit their real stride that early. Some came in with stories admittedly good but not in a class with what they would produce later. For them, the great flowering occurred in the next high period, which followed the low one of the late forties.

The rather dismal character of science fiction as that decade waned has ordinarily been blamed on the war, which called star writers into military service or related industry. However, this explanation won't do. For one thing, not every leader was so tied up; for another, several of those who were still found time for an occasional story; and, finally, the war ended in 1945. Because of publishing lags, many classics appeared in 1942 and early 1943. Why did we see so few for a while after, say, 1946?

There were some in this interval, of course; there always are. But they were much scarcer than before, while minor stories, which used to be at least entertaining, ranged from mediocre on downward. Again—I don't know the reason; I merely point to the fact.

A STRICT twelve-year cycle would have made things change for the better in 1950. Actually, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* was founded a year earlier, under the co-editorship of Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. *Galaxy*, though, followed on schedule, edited by Horace Gold. The

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alternation of good and bad periods is not a matter of go-no-go. Insofar as one can draw a curve, it's fairly smooth in its ascents and descents.

Though it's common and doubtless correct to speak of the next few years as the Boucher-Gold renaissance, one should bear in mind that it applied to every magazine. For instance, Walter Miller, Jr., whose famous *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was originally a trilogy of novelettes in *F&SF*, was a frequent contributor to *Astounding* and appeared a bit elsewhere. This was also approximately the year when science fiction book publishing began to have some importance.

For whatever it's worth, I date myself here; a few things of mine had appeared earlier, but not till 1950 was there anything which I can now stand to re-read. Brilliant writers came forth who unfortunately seem to have retired afterward, such as A. J. Budrys, Mildred Clingerman, Theodore Cogswell, and Richard Matheson. Others are happily still with us, such as Arthur C. Clarke, Avram Davidson, Philip K. Dick, Gordon R. Dickson, Philip Jose Farmer, James Gunn, James H. Schmitz, Thomas N. Scortia, and Jack Vance. And as mentioned earlier, this was when some people introduced in the previous era—Bester, Blish, Sturgeon, et al.—got really spectacular.

Eventually that brightness likewise faded out. The later fifties got increasingly dreary, with a few honorable exceptions like C. M. Kornbluth while he lived. He, by the way, began in the 1938 part of the sequence. Thus he exemplifies the fact that a writer cannot be typecast, but may begin as one breed of cat and go on to become successive different kinds, increasingly significant.

Boucher once told me that when he and McComas started their partnership, it took two of them to accept a story; by the time McComas resigned, they were so hard up for decent material that it took two of them to reject a submission. I well remember how frustrating it was to live and try to work in such a slack period: There just wasn't enough stimulation around; books from Heinlein, Simak, & Co. came too seldom to help much. Shakespear himself couldn't have done what he did if he hadn't happened to be simply the tallest in a race of giants. We humbler scriveners wondered why almost everybody else was turning out mere yard goods, and bitched a lot.

THE next great breakthrough hasn't anything as exact to tie to as the assumption of an editorship or the establishment of a magazine. But doesn't 1962 seem a reasonable date? Though doubtless not responsible by itself for the kind of innovation we were to get in the following decade, Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle* was, in that

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year, a dazzling portent.

Again, writers who had come in earlier but for the most part not been extremely noticeable—Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Harlan Ellison, Harry Harrison, Frank Herbert, Robert Silverberg, Cordwainer Smith, etc.—began to do fantastic things, along with later arrivals like Samuel R. Delany, Joseph Green, R. A. Lafferty, Ursula K. LeGuin, Larry Niven, James Tiptree, Jr., and Roger Zelazny, to name only a few. (My apologies to those who don't appear on any of these lists, which are intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive and inevitably leave off many who are fully comparable.) Some of the real old-timers, e.g., Pohl and Williamson, appear to have caught fire from them; be that as it may, they too started off on fresh courses and made major contributions. Others like Heinlein and Leiber, who were always experimental, carried out especially successful experiments at this time and subsequently. Speaking personally once more, I can say that I learned much and was motivated to try pathways hitherto untrodden by me. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

To hell with jabber about a New Wave. It never existed. The people usually identified with it almost all denied being part of any such thing. Delany, for instance, aside from his stylistic brilliance, was an old-fashioned story teller, and sometimes went in for scientific or technological extrapolation worthy of a Clement. What we got was simply a wave of, shall I say, new blood.

In fact, it is impossible to identify any kind of science fiction wholly with any period. A superficial commentator might say something like: "The Gernsback era created far-out concepts. The original Campbell era concentrated on what could happen to society as a consequence of the author's assumptions. The Boucher-Gold influence brought the focus onto the individual character. The New Wave, or whatever one calls it, introduced up-to-date literary techniques, changed the emphasis from hard to 'soft' science, and employed the concepts more for their symbolic import than for their own sakes."

To this sort of claim, the sole appropriate reply is, "Nonsense!" Every one of these approaches and emphases has been present throughout. The fine writing and close attention to the individual of Stuart in the thirties is matched by the cosmic scope and engineering detail of Niven in the sixties (and of course the work of each also has qualities mentioned here in connection with the others). Bester was conducting stylistic experiments and Farmer was employing potent symbolisms in the fifties; Leiber did both. As Campbell once pointed out, among the first psionic

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stories—"soft" science, if you will—was Smith's *Galactic Patrol.* Under Gold's direction, *Galaxy* ran many pieces of the "if this goes on" variety, perhaps more than *Astounding* ever did. It's pitifully easy to demolish the notion that any one characteristic is exclusive to any one period.

True, the mix has varied. Most if not all the advances at a given time go in some directions rather than others. And however uneven, there is a general artistic as well as ideational progress. Today we may or may not have a few writers within the field who, in an absolute sense, are better than Stuart. That's largely a matter of the reader's individual judgment, which is partly conditioned by literary fashions. But undeniably, we have several who are at least as good. Furthermore, the minor writers of today are more skillful than the minor writers of yesterday. We've learned some things.

THIS tends to obscure the unpleasant fact that, during the past few years, science fiction as a whole has again become less interesting than it used to be. The young writers are no longer exactly young, their pioneering has been completed, it's gotten hard to find a story that isn't a variation on a well-known theme. Not impossible, but hard.

What growth in popularity science fiction has been enjoying of late does not disprove this. It merely shows that new readers have come in, readers who aren't yet familiar with what we've been doing all along, and therefore are intrigued by it.

The boom isn't that big anyway; compare the sale of a moderately successful "mainstream" novel to the very best that any science fiction book can hope for. Likewise, our current academic respectability is simply riding on the bandwagon of a vogue for pop culture of every sort. If it has nothing else to recommend it, it will soon go the way of the unlamented Black-Studies programs.

Assuming you are a fairly long-time fan, ask yourself how many really original works of science fiction you have encountered in the near past, and I think you'll understand what I mean.

Do we then have hope for the future?

Well, if the curve of quality continues, we do, beginning right now in 1974.

Don't expect instant renaissance. I repeat, to the extent that the cyclical notion has merit, it still isn't a yes-or-no proposition. Think of breakers, moving through time rather than space. A trough occurs two or three years before the subsequent rise becomes unmistakable. The wave begins to get quite steep at about the twelve-year point: Later it rises at a somewhat reduced rate. Eventually it crests,

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and tapers off more slowly than it rose. Even at the peak there are plenty of bad stories, and even in the trough there are a few which will endure.

Remember also that makers who first appear at one point in time often become major parts of a later cycle, or set of cycles. And remember that no single kind of science fiction has ever completely occupied any period—for which we should be duly grateful.

Thus the pattern by itself merely predicts that soon we will be seeing more exciting, innovative stories than we have been seeing lately. It does not predict what sorts they will be or who will write them. If we are on the way up, there must be indications of this; but hindsight alone will identify them with certainty.

However, I'll venture a guess, which may prove utterly wrong. It's based on current reading, obviously biased by my own tastes, and on observation of what works have, over the years, been best received.

THIS is not the place to repeat an essay of mine in the seventh annual Nebula Award anthology, except to make a very brief synopsis for purposes of clarification. What *are* the varieties of science fiction? Needless to say, no worthwhile story will fit into any neat little pigeonhole. But can't we invent some descriptive phrases, rough-and-ready yet a bit more serviceable than vague generalizations?

Ballantine Books

We meet again, aha. Coming from the secret, underground, inner world that exists in every major corporation, a word of cheer about BB's July list which features the novel Bill Retsler has written based on his novella, PATRON OF THE ARTS. You'd never suspect he has that kind of talent, bon vivant and high liver that he is. But he has. Read it already—a fusion of art and science. Sex too. Well, what did you expect? Publishers Weekly loved the book, too: "His protagonist, a wealthy patron of the arts in the middling near future, provides a springboard for some fascinating speculation on the melding of art and technology [the major art form here is the "sensatron cube," a gadget involving sonics and alpha waves], as well as on the aesthetics of "alien" art—in this case the artifacts of the long-vanished Martians. There's a cracking good plot . .. An auspicious start to a promising career."

July is also the month when we do our annual Terry Carr anthology—technically, THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF THE YEAR #3, and very good it is. It should be, with writers like Alfie Bester, Bob Silverberg, Lafferty, Le Guin, Farmer, Tiptree, et al.

Which brings us to the fact that this month may just possibly see our zany fantasy satire THE PRINCESS BRIDE, published as "mainstream." [We say may because who knows whether we'll get that splendid foldout-map-cover out of the printer in time. But we'll try]. Anyway, it's fantasy, whatever it has to be called by the

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uninformed, so keep an eye out for it. Also in July there'll be a reissue of THE TOLKIEN READER [my God, again?] Now there's a mainstream writer for you. The difference between mainstream and fantasy and s.f. is really numbers. And that is where it is at.

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Other matters: there's a rumor afoot—odd place for it to be, should surely be amouth—that a house other than BB is imitating our BEST OF collection series. [You remember it started with Stanley G. Weinbaum. [Who?] We're in favor of imitation which improves the product hence regret this particular effort. Prices continue to climb, alas, whiffling about between $1.25 to $1.50, to $1.65—depending on length and reaching, in MERLIN'S RING, by H. Warner Munn, the frightful figure of $1.95—but it's a lot of book for the money. An honest Adult Fantasy that goes from Atlantis to mid-15th Century Europe. Vast territory and a cast of thousands. Done in June, but be warned to get it while you can. Do not dally. For alas, our lovely and beloved Adult Fantasy line is quote phasing out unquote. We'll keep the best of it in print, and we have yet to complete the Mabinegian epic. Evangeline Walton's First Branch [PRINCE OF ANNWN] is due in December. And Katherine Kurtz with her Deryni world will be heard from in 1975. Aside from that we will be sneaking some of the goodies into the science-fiction list from time to time. Who knows, maybe even into the mainstream list. The jewels will be kept alive. And meanwhile, it is enormous fun to have the editorial we a fact. Happily, BB

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FLASH: Cheers to Arthur C. Clarke on winning the Nubula for Rendezvous With Rama! More on that splendid novel—coming from BB in September—in future columns!

It seems to me that we can, but that we need two dimensions rather than one. First, we can ask ourselves what the scientific content of a story is. Does the author emphasize hard science a la Clement or Niven? Does he develop the implications of a pseudoscientific or quasiscientific idea such as time travel? Does he take for granted whatever technology his story requires, and make the narrative about something else altogether, such as political or personal relationships? (A majority of science fiction stories have always done this.) Does he ignore or deny any data that don't suit his purposes, as Ray Bradbury, quite legitimately, did in *The Martian Chronicles?*

(People who still feel hurt at being omitted from earlier lists may note that he was too—on purpose, to make sure they'd be in good company!)

Besides these four uses or nonuses of science as thematic material, we can find three basic attitudes, technophilic, technophobic, and neutral. That is, a story may imply, or declare outright, that science and technology are inherently good, or inherently bad, or neither. (For a technophobic hard-science novel, see Huxley's *Brave New World.*) Thus we can define twelve classes of science fiction. While the classification of a particular work may be debatable, the categories are perhaps useful for getting a quick historical overview.

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Rather to my own surprise, I found that a disproportionately large number of Hugo and Nebula awards have gone to science fiction which is hard, technophilic, or both—emphasis on ideas which lie within real science and technology, or not far outside them; favorable attitude toward man's continuing his efforts in these areas. A check through magazine and book indexes seemed to show that these types have also been most commonly published, therefore presumably most popular. Both statements are true even of the post-1962 years, which in the eyes of many commentators were identified more with authors who were not interested in discussing scientific detail and had mainly technophobic messages to deliver.

If the foregoing analysis is right, then our traditional themes and orientations will continue strong.

Now I'll go beyond the analysis, into strictly personal impressions and prejudices, and say that technophilic hard science fiction will not only flourish, it will dominate the coming cycle. Other forms won't vanish, and interesting things will continue to be done in them; but they won't be on the cutting edge any longer.

The reason for supposing this is twofold. First we have the tremendous explosion of science and technology themselves. They may or may not be the last remaining endeavors of Western civilization that future historians of culture will remember. I suspect they are but I could be mistaken. What is beyond doubt is that here is where a hell of a lot of creative energy is going, and one must be dead between the ears not to be fascinated by the results. In fact—second half of my reason—a number of writers are fascinated, among them neophytes with considerable talent.

At the latest annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and afterward at the Nebula meeting of Science Fiction Writers of America, where scientists and astronauts were among the speakers, I witnessed whole universes go down in flames. The comfortably familiar worlds we have been writing about are no more. Within the Solar System, space probes and Lunar landings have given us too many contrary data. To name a single example, it turns out that the big moons of Jupiter are engulfed in lethal radiation. So there go "Meeting With Medusa," *Farmer in the Sky*, "Bridge," "Desertion," "Call Me Joe," and hundreds of similar tales. As for the larger cosmos, it's full of things like black holes; galaxies may result from waves passing through the interstellar medium, unless they're blown out of bigger objects; causality may not always apply, even to events above the subatomic level; and so on indefinitely. As for technology, look around you. Yes, the dear old seva-

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gram is dead. But from a literary viewpoint, it was getting too constricted anyway. Think what stories await us in the new!

Adaptations of Franz Kafka and Philip Roth were no doubt useful to us in the recent past, and will no doubt still be written by some, which is okay. But most science fiction readers have now been there. Where they have not yet been is into the vast potentialities I was hinting at. Or, rather, they are starting to enter these. Their guides are certain of the writers already mentioned, plus newer ones like Greg Benford, William Cochrane, Joe Haldeman, Vonda McIntyre, Jerry Pournelle, and Stanley Schmidt. This is a mixed enough bag to promise us abundant variety. What they, and others like them, have in common seems to me to be just two things. First, they make skillful use of the psychological insights and literary techniques which the dozen years behind us have made common currency within science fiction. Second, their orientation is more outward than inward.

Simultaneously, I think we have already experienced a rebirth of fantasy. Never mind what that is, or for that matter what science fiction is. Boucher once remarked to me while he was editing that most of his readers actually preferred fantasy to science fiction but didn't know it. Here I am using the term to mean flights of the narrative imagination which don't even pretend to involve things that might be physically possible—though as a rule they have a strict rationale of their own.

Such books don't normally sell quite as well as those labelled "science fiction." I can't say why; they don't, that's all. Therefore we aren't likely to see as many of them, or as many short stories of this type. Nonetheless, in the wake of Tolkien, fantasy seems to be enjoying a modest increase of popularity. This is calling forth a number of practitioners, old-timers like de Camp and Leiber, middle-timers like Andre Norton, and new-timers like Katherine Kurtz, inspired to produce tales which are wonderful in the proper sense of that word.

To sum up, my very possibly mistaken prediction is that around the next few years there will cluster several outstanding new writers, established writers suddenly striking out in new directions, and venerable writers doing the same. In science fiction, the emphasis will be on legitimate science and technology, though stories with quite different motifs will appear too. At the same time, straight fantasy will be more widely accepted and will see a great deal of development. In short, we're headed into a second early-Campbell period, when *Astounding* and *Unknown* were both going strong, only we'll carry it further. And what, pray tell, is wrong with that? ★

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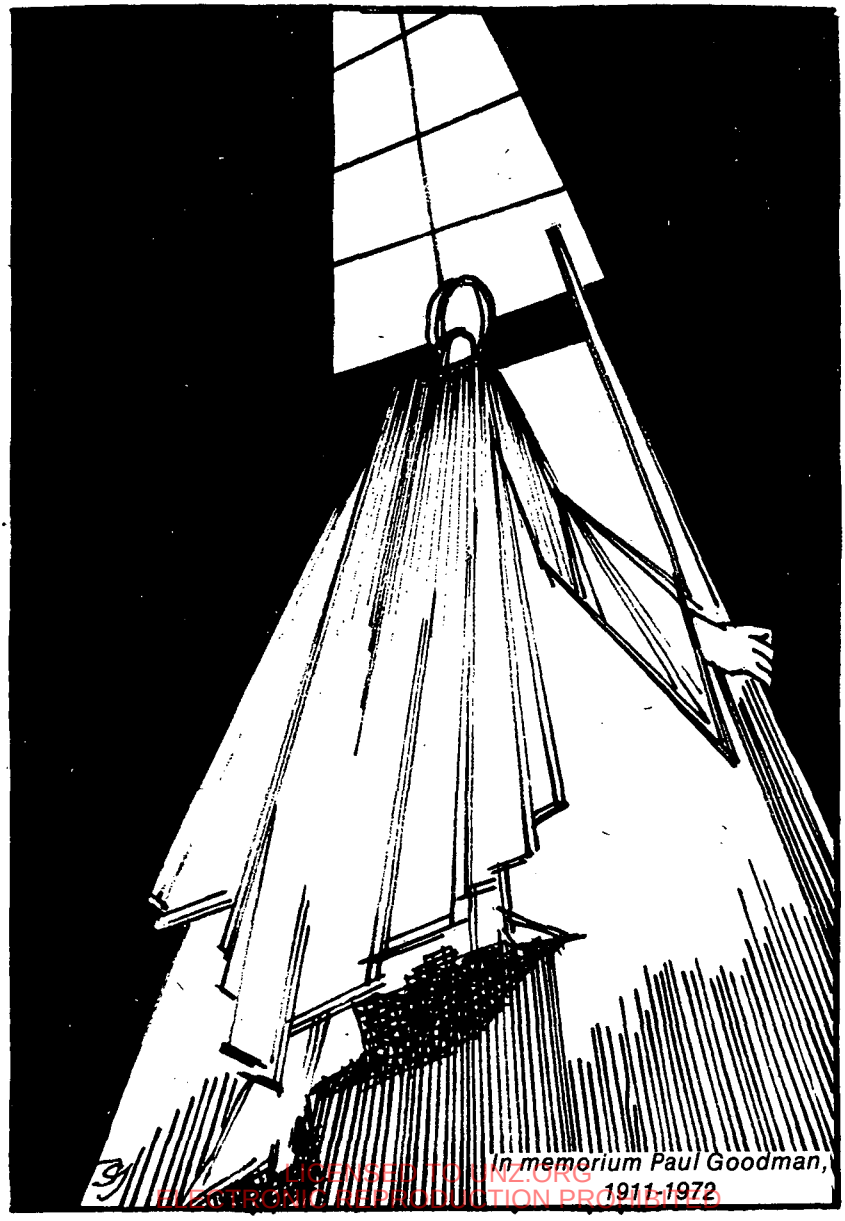
THE DAY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION



In memorium Paul Goodman, 1911-1972

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URSULA K. Le GUIN

This story is a 'prequel' to Ursula's superb new novel THE DISPOSSESSED. *The events depicted herein occur about 200 years prior to those in the novel.*

THE speaker's voice was loud as empty beer-trucks in a stone street, and the people at the meeting were jammed up close, cobblestones, that great voice booming over them. Taviri was somewhere on the other side of the hall. She had to get to him. She wormed and pushed her way among the dark-clothed, close-packed people. She did not hear the words, nor see the faces: only the booming, and the bodies pressed one behind the other. She could not see Taviri, she was too short. A broad black-vested belly and chest loomed up blocking her way. She must get through to Taviri. Sweating, she jabbed fiercely with her fist. It was like hitting stones, he did not move at all, but the huge lungs let out right over her head a prodigious noise, a bellow. She cowered. Then she understood that the bellow had not been at her. Others were shouting. The speaker had said something, something fine about taxes or shadows. Thrilled, she joined the shouting—"Yes! Yes!"—and shoving on, came out easily into the open expanse of the Regimental Drill Field in Parheo. Overhead the evening sky lay deep and colorless, and all around her nodded the tall weeds with dry, white, close-floreted heads. She had never known what they were called. The flowers nodded above her head, swaying in the wind that always blew across the fields in the dusk. She ran among them, and they whipped lithe aside and stood up again swaying, silent. Taviri stood among the tall weeds in his good suit, the dark grey one that made him look like a professor or a play-actor, harshly elegant. He did not look happy, but he was laughing, and saying something to her. The sound of his voice made her cry, and she reached out to catch hold of his hand, but she did not stop, quite. She could not stop. "Oh, Taviri," she said, "it's just on there!" The queer sweet smell of the white weeds was heavy as she went on. There were thorns, tangles underfoot, there were slopes, pits. She feared to fall . . . she stopped.

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Sun, bright morning-glare, straight in the eyes, relentless. She had forgotten to pull the blind last night. She turned her back on the sun, but the right side wasn't comfortable. No use. Day. She sighed twice, sat up, got her legs over the edge of the bed, and sat hunched in her nightdress looking down at her feet.

The toes, compressed by a lifetime of cheap shoes, were almost square where they touched each other, and bulged out above in corns; the nails were discolored and shapeless. Between the knob-like ankle bones ran fine, dry wrinkles. The brief little plain at the base of the toes had kept its delicacy, but the skin was the color of mud, and knotted veins crossed the instep. Disgusting. Sad, depressing. Mean. Pitiful. She tried on all the words, and they all fit, like hideous little hats. Hideous: yes, that one too. To look at oneself and find it hideous, what a job! But then, when she hadn't been hideous, had she sat around and stared at herself like this? Not much! A proper body's not an object, not an implement, not a belonging to be admired, it's just you, yourself. Only when it's no longer you, but yours, a thing owned, do you worry about it—Is it in good shape? Will it do? Will it last?

"Who cares?" said Laia fiercely, and stood up.

It made her giddy to stand up suddenly. She had to put out her hand to the bedtable, for she dreaded falling. At that she thought of reaching out to Taviri, in the dream.

What had he said? She could not remember. She was not sure if she had even touched his hand. She frowned, trying to force memory. It had been so long since she had dreamed about Taviri; and now not even to remember what he had said!

It was gone, it was gone. She stood there hunched in her nightdress, frowning, one hand on the bedtable. How long was it since she had thought of him—let alone dreamed of him—even thought of him, as 'Taviri'? How long since she had said his name?

Asieo said. When Asieo and I were in prison in the North. Before I met Asieo. Asieo's theory of reciprocity. Oh yes, she talked about him, talked about him too much no doubt, maundered, dragged him in. But as 'Asieo,' the last name, the public man. The private man was gone, utterly gone. There were so few left who had even known him. They had all used to be in jail. One laughed about it on those days, all the friends in all the jails. But they weren't even there, these days. They were in the prison cemeteries. Or in the common graves.

"Oh, oh my dear," Laia said out loud, and she sank down onto the bed again because she could not stand up under the remembrance of those first weeks in the Fort, in

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the cell, those first weeks of the nine years in the Fort in Drio, in the cell, those first weeks after they told her that Asieo had been killed in the fighting in Capitol Square and had been buried with the Fourteen Hundred in the lime-ditches behind Oring Gate. In the cell. Her hands fell into the old position on her lap, the left clenched and locked inside the grip of the right, the right thumb working back and forth a little pressing and rubbing on the knuckle of the left first finger. Hours, days, nights. She had thought of them all, each one, each one of the fourteen hundred, how they lay, how the quicklime worked on the flesh, how the bones touched in the burning dark. Who touched him? How did the slender bones of the hand lie now? Hours, years.

"Taviri, I have never forgotten you!" she whispered, and the stupidity of it brought her back to morning-light and the rumpled bed. Of course she hadn't forgotten him. These things go without saying between husband and wife. There were her ugly old feet flat on the floor again, just as before. She had got nowhere at all, she had gone in a circle. She stood up with a grunt of effort and disapproval, and went to the closet for her dressing gown.

The young people went about the halls of the House in becoming immodesty, but she was too old for that. She didn't want to spoil some young man's breakfast with the sight of her. Besides, they had grown up in the principle of freedom of dress and sex and all the rest, and she hadn't. All she had done was invent it. It's not the same.

Like speaking of Asieo as 'my husband.' They winced. The word she should use as a good Odonian, of course, was 'partner.' But why the hell did she have to be a good Odonian?

She shuffled down the hall to the bathrooms. Mairo was there, washing her hair in a lavatory. Laia looked at the long, sleek, wet hank with admiration. She got out of the House so seldom now that she didn't know when she had last seen a respectably shaven scalp, but still the sight of a full head of hair gave her pleasure, vigorous pleasure. How many times had she been jeered at, *Longhair, Longhair,* had her hair pulled by policemen or young toughs, had her hair shaved off down to the scalp by a grinning soldier at each new prison? And then had grown it all over again, through the fuzz, to the frizz, to the curls, to the mane . . . In the old days. For God's love, couldn't she think of anything today but the old days?

Dressed, her bed made, she went down to commons. It was a good breakfast, but she had never got her appetite back since the damned stroke. She drank two cups of herb tea, but couldn't finish the piece of

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fruit she had taken. How she had craved fruit as a child, badly enough to steal it; and in the Fort—oh for God's love stop it! She smiled and replied to the greetings and friendly inquiries of the other breakfasters and big Aevi who was serving the counter this morning. It was he who had tempted her with the peach, "Look at this, I've been saving it for you," and how could she refuse? Anyway she had always loved fruit, and never got enough; once when she was six or seven she had stolen a piece off a vendor's cart in River Street. But it was hard to eat when everyone was talking so excitedly. There was news from Thu, real news. She was inclined to discount it at first, being wary of enthusiasms, but after she had read the article in the paper, and read between the lines of it, she thought, with a strange kind of certainty, deep but cold, Why, this is it; it has come. And in Thu, not here. Thu will break before this country does; the Revolution will first prevail there. As if that mattered! There will be no more nations. And yet it did matter somehow, it made her a little cold and sad—envious, in fact. Of all the infinite stupidities. She did not join the talk much, and soon got up to go back to her room, feeling sorry for herself. She could not share their excitement. She was out of it, really out of it. It's not easy, she said to herself in justification, laboriously climbing the stairs, to accept being out of it when you've been in it, in the center of it, for fifty years. Oh for God's love. Whining!

She got the stairs and the self-pity behind her, entering her room. It was a good room, and it was good to be by herself. It was a great relief. Even if it wasn't strictly fair. Some of the kids in the attics were living five to a room no bigger than this. There were always more people wanting to live in an Odonian House than could be properly accommodated. She had this big room all to herself only because she was an old woman who had had a stroke. And maybe because she was Odo. If she hadn't been Odo, but merely the old woman with a stroke, would she have had it? Very likely. After all who the hell wanted to room with a drooling old woman? But it was hard to be sure. Favoritism, elitism, leader-worship, they crept back and cropped out everywhere. But she had never hoped to see them eradicated in her lifetime, in one generation; only Time works the great changes. Meanwhile this was a nice, large, sunny room, proper for a drooling old woman who had started a world revolution.

Her secretary would be coming in an hour to help her dispatch the day's work. She shuffled over to the desk, a beautiful, big piece, a present from the Nio Cabinetmakers' Syndicate because somebody had heard her remark once that the only piece of furniture she

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had ever really longed for was a desk with drawers and enough room on top . . . damn, the top was practically covered with papers with notes clipped to them, mostly in Noi's small clear handwriting: Urgent. — Northern Provinces. — Consult w/R.T.?

Her own handwriting had never been the same since Asieo's death. It was odd, when you thought about it. After all, within five years after his death she had written the whole *Analogy*. And there were those letters, which the tall guard with the watery grey eyes, what was his name, never mind, had smuggled out of the Fort for her for two years. *The Prison Letters* they called them now, there were a dozen different editions of them. All that stuff, the letters which people kept telling her were so full of "spiritual strength"—which probably meant she had been lying herself blue in the face when she wrote them, trying to keep her spirits up—and the *Analogy* which was certainly the solidest intellectual work she had ever done, all of that had been written in the Fort in Drio, in the cell, after Asieo's death. One had to do something, and in the Fort they let one have paper and pens . . . But it had all been written in the hasty, scribbling hand which she had never felt was hers, not her own like the round, black scrollings of the manuscript of *Society Without Government*, forty-five years old. Taviri had taken not only her body's and her heart's desire to the quicklime with him, but even her good clear handwriting.

But he had left her the revolution.

How brave of you to go on, to work, to write, in prison, after such a defeat for the Movement, after your partner's death, people had used to say. Damn fools. What else had there been to do? Bravery, courage—what was courage? She had never figured it out. Not fearing, some said. Fearing yet going on, others said. But what could one do but go on? Had one any real choice, ever?

To die was merely to go on in another direction.

If you wanted to come home you had to keep going on, that was what she meant when she wrote, "True journey is return," but it had never been more than an intuition, and she was farther than ever now from being able to rationalise it. She bent down, too suddenly, so that she grunted a little at the creak in her bones, and began to root in a bottom drawer of the desk. Her hand came to an age-softened folder and drew it out, recognizing it by touch before sight confirmed: the manuscript of *Syndical Organization in Revolutionary Transition*. He had printed the title on the folder and written his name under it, Taviri Odo Asieo, IX 741. There was an elegant handwriting, every

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letter well-formed, bold, and fluent. But he had preferred to use a voiceprinter. The manuscript was all in voiceprint, and high quality too, hesitancies adjusted and idiosyncrasies of speech normalized. You couldn't see there how he had said 'o' deep in his throat as they did on the North Coast. There was nothing of him there but his mind. She had nothing of him at all except his name written on the folder. She hadn't kept his letters, it was sentimental to keep letters. Besides, she never kept anything. She couldn't think of anything that she had ever owned for more than a few years, except this ramshackle old body, of course, and she was stuck with that . . .

Dualizing again. "She" and "it." Age and illness made on dualist, made one escapist; the mind insisted, *It's not me, it's not me.* But it was. Maybe the mystics could detach mind from body, she had always rather wistfully envied them the chance, without hope of emulating them. Escape had never been her game. She had sought for freedom here, now, body and soul.

First self-pity, then self-praise, and here she still sat, for God's love, holding Asieo's name in her hand, why? Didn't she know his name without looking it up? What was wrong with her? She raised the folder to her lips and kissed the handwritten name firmly and squarely, replaced the folder in the back of the bottom drawer, shut the drawer, and straightened up in the chair. Her right hand tingled. She scratched it, and then shook it in the air, spitefully. It had never quite got over the stroke. Neither had her right leg, or right eye, or the right corner of her mouth. They were sluggish, inept, they tingled. They made her feel like a robot with a short circuit.

And time was getting on, Noi would be coming, what had she been doing ever since breakfast?

She got up so hastily that she lurched, and grabbed at the chairback to make sure she did not fall. She went down the hall to the bathroom and looked in the big mirror there. Her grey knot was loose and droopy, she hadn't done it up well before breakfast. She struggled with it a while. It was hard to keep her arms up in the air. Amai, running in to piss, stopped and said, "Let me do it!" and knotted it up tight and neat in no time, with her round, strong, pretty fingers, smiling and silent. Ami was twenty, less than a third of Laia's age. Her parents had both been members of the Movement, one killed in the insurrection of '60, the other still recruiting in the South Provinces. Amai had grown up in Odonian Houses, born to the Revolution, a true daughter of anarchy. And so quiet and free and beautiful a child, enough to make you cry when you thought: this is what we worked for, this is what we meant, this is it, here she is, alive, the

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kindly, lovely future.

Laia Osaieo Odo's right eye wept several little tears, as she stood between the lavatories and the latrines having her hair done up by the daughter she had not borne; but her left eye, the strong one, did not weep, nor did it know what the right eye did.

She thanked Amai and hurried back to her room. She had noticed, in the mirror, a stain on her collar. Peach juice, probably. Damned old dribbler. She didn't want Noi to come in and find her with drool on her collar.

As the clean shirt went on over her head, she thought, What's so special about Noi?

She fastened the collar-frogs with her left hand, slowly.

Noi was thirty or so, a slight, muscular fellow with a soft voice and alert dark eyes. That's what was special about Noi. It was that simple. Good old sex. She had never been drawn to a fair man or a fat one, or the tall fellows with big biceps, never, not even when she was fourteen and fell in love with every passing fart. Dark, spare, and fiery, that was the recipe. Taviri, of course. This boy wasn't a patch on Taviri for brains, nor even for looks, but there it was: She didn't want him to see her with dribble on her collar and her hair coming undone.

Her thin, grey hair.

Noi came in, just pausing in the open doorway—my God, she hadn't even shut the door while changing her shirt!—She looked at him and saw herself. The old woman.

You could brush your hair and change your shirt, or you could wear last week's shirt and last night's braids, or you could put on cloth of gold and dust your shaven scalp with diamond powder. None of it would make the slightest difference. The old woman would look a little less, or a little more, grotesque.

One keeps oneself neat out of mere decency, mere sanity, awareness of other people.

And finally even that goes, and one dribbles unashamed.

"Good morning," the young man said in his gentle voice.

"Hello, Noi."

No, by God, it was *not* out of mere decency. Decency be damned. Because the man she had loved, and to whom her age would not have mattered—because he was dead, must she pretend she had no sex? Must she suppress the truth, like a damned puritan authoritarian? Even six months ago, before the stroke, she had made men look at her and like to look at her; and now, though she could give no pleasure, by God she could please herself.

When she was six years old, and Papa's friend Gādeo used to come by to talk politics with Papa after dinner, she would put on the gold-colored necklace that Mama had found on a trash-heap and brought

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home for her. It was so short that it always got hidden under her collar where nobody could see it. She liked it that way. She knew she had it on. She sat on the doorstep and listened to them talk, and knew that she looked nice for Gadeo. He was dark, with white teeth that flashed. Sometimes he called her "pretty Laia." "There's my pretty Laia!" Sixty-six years ago.

"What? My head's dull. I had a terrible night." It was true. She had slept even less than usual.

"I was asking if you'd seen the papers this morning."

She nodded.

"Pleased about Soinehe?"

Soinehe was the province in Thu which had declared its secession from the Thuvian State last night.

He was pleased about it. His white teeth flashed in his dark, alert face. Pretty Laia.

"Yes. And apprehensive."

"I know. But it's the real thing, this time. It's the beginning of the end of the Government in Thu. They haven't even tried to order troops into Soinehe, you know. It would merely provoke the soldiers into rebellion sooner, and they know it."

She agreed with him. She herself had felt that certainty. But she could not share his delight. After a lifetime of living on hope because there is nothing but hope, one loses the taste for victory. A real sense of triumph must be preceded by real despair. She had unlearned despair a long time ago. There were no more triumphs. One went on.

"Shall we do those letters today?"

"All right. Which letters?"

"To the people in the North," he said without impatience.

"In the North?"

"Parheo, Oaidun."

She had been born in Parheo, the dirty city on the dirty river. She had not come here to the capital till she was twenty-two and ready to bring the Revolution. Though in those days, before she and the others had thought it through, it had been a very green and puerile revolution. Strikes for better wages, representation for women. Votes and wages—Power and Money, for the love of God! Well, one does learn a little, after all, in fifty years.

But then one must forget it all.

"Start with Oaidun," she said, sitting down in the armchair. Noi was at the desk ready to work. He read out excerpts from the letters she was to answer. She tried to pay attention, and succeeded well enough that she dictated one whole letter and started on another. "Remember that at this stage your brotherhood is vulnerable to the threat of . . . no, to the danger . . . to . . ." She groped till Noi suggested, "The danger of leader-worship?"

"All right. And that nothing is so soon corrupted by power-seeking as altruism. No. And that nothing corrupts altruism—no. Oh for

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God's love you know what I'm trying to say, Noi, you write it. They know it too, it's just the same old stuff, why can't they read my books!"

"Touch," Noi said gently, smiling, citing one of the central Odonian themes.

"All right, but I'm tired of being touched. If you'll write the letter I'll sign it, but I can't be bothered with it this morning." He was looking at her with a little question or concern. She said, irritable, "There is something else I have to do!"

WHEN Noi had gone she sat down at the desk and moved the papers about, pretending to be doing something, because she had been startled, frightened, by the words she had said. She had nothing else to do. She never had had anything else to do. This was her work: her lifework. The speaking tours and the meetings and the streets were out of reach for her now, but she could still write, and that was her work. And anyhow if she had had anything else to do, Noi would have known it; he kept her schedule, and tactfully reminded her of things, like the visit from the foreign students this afternoon.

Oh, damn. She liked the young, and there was always something to learn from a foreigner, but she was tired of new faces, and tired of being on view. She learned from them, but they didn't learn from her; they had learnt all she had to teach long ago, from her books, from the Movement. They just came to look, as if she were the Great Tower in Rodarred, or the Canyon of the Tulaevea. A phenomenon, a monument. They were awed, adoring. She snarled at them: Think your own thoughts!—That's not anarchism, that's mere obscurantism.—You don't think liberty and discipline are incompatible, do you?—They accepted their tonguelashing meekly as children, gratefully, as if she were some kind of All-Mother, the idol of the Big Sheltering Womb. She! She who had mined the shipyards at Seissero, and had cursed Premier Inoilte to his face in front of a crowd of seven thousand, telling him he would have cut off his own balls and had them bronzed and sold as souvenirs, if he thought there was any profit in it—she who had screeched, and sworn, and kicked policemen, and spat at priests, and pissed in public on the big brass plaque in Capitol Square that said HERE WAS FOUNDED THE SOVEREIGN NATION STATE OF A-IO ETC ETC, pssssssss to all that! And now she was everybody's grandmama, the dear old lady, the sweet old monument, come worship at the womb. The fire's out, boys, it's safe to come up close.

"No, I won't," Laia said out loud. "I will not." She was not self-conscious about talking to herself, because she always had talked to herself. "Laia's invisible audience,"

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Taviri had used to say, as she went through the room muttering. "You needn't come, I won't be here," she told the invisible audience now. She had just decided what it was she had to do. She had to go out. To go into the streets.

It was inconsiderate to disappoint the foreign students. It was erratic, typically senile. It was un-Odonian. Psssss to all that. What was the good working for freedom all your life and ending up without any freedom at all? She would go out for a walk.

"What is an anarchist? One who, choosing, accepts the responsibility of choice."

On the way downstairs she decided, scowling, to stay and see the foreign students. But then she would go out.

They were very young students, very earnest: doe-eyed, shaggy, charming creatures from the Western Hemisphere, Benbili and the Kingdom of Mand, the girls in white trousers, the boys in long kilts, warlike and archaic. They spoke of their hopes. "We in Mand are so very far from the Revolution that maybe we are near it," said one of the girls, wistful and smiling: "The Circle of Life!" and she showed the extremes meeting, in the circle of her slender, dark-skinned fingers. Amai and Aevi served them white wine and brown bread, the hospitality of the House. But the visitors, unpresumptuous, all rose to take their leave after barely half an hour. "No, no, no," Laia said, "stay here, talk with Aevi and Amai. It's just that I get stiff sitting down, you see, I have to change about. It has been so good to meet you, will you come back to see me, my little brothers and sisters, soon?" For her heart went out to them, and theirs to her, and she exchanged kisses all round, laughing, delighted by the dark young cheeks, the affectionate eyes, the scented hair, before she shuffled off. She was really a little tired, but to go up and take a nap would be a defeat. She had wanted to go out. She would go out. She had not been alone outdoors since—when? since winter! before the stroke. No wonder she was getting morbid. It had been a regular jail sentence. Outside, the streets, that's where she lived.

She went quietly out the side door of the House, past the vegetable patch, to the street. The narrow strip of sour city dirt had been beautifully gardened and was producing a fine crop of beans and *ceea*, but Laia's eye for farming was unenlightened. Of course it had been clear that anarchist communities, even in the time of transition, must work towards optimal self-support, but how that was to be managed in the way of actual dirt and plants wasn't her business. There were farmers and agronomists for that. Her job was the streets, the noisy, stinking streets of stone, where she had grown up and

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lived all her life, except for the fifteen years in prison.

She looked up fondly at the facade of the House. That it had been built as a bank gave peculiar satisfaction to its present occupants. They kept their sacks of meal in the bombproof money-vault, and aged their cider in kegs in safe deposit boxes. Over the fussy columns that faced the street, carved letters still read, "NATIONAL INVESTORS AND GRAIN FACTORS BANKING ASSOCIATION." The Movement was not strong on names. They had no flag. Slogans came and went as the need did. There was always the Circle of Life to scratch on walls and pavements where Authority would have to see it. But when it came to names they were indifferent, accepting and ignoring whatever they got called, afraid of being pinned down and penned in, unafraid of being absurd. So this best known and second oldest of all the cooperative Houses had no name except The Bank.

It faced on a wide and quiet street, but only a block away began the Temeba, an open market, once famous as a center for black market psychogenics and teratogenics, now reduced to vegetables, secondhand clothes, and miserable sideshows. Its crapulous vitality was gone, leaving only half-paralysed alcoholics, addicts, cripples, hucksters, and fifth-rate whores, pawnshops, gambling dens, fortune-tellers, body sculptors, and cheap hotels. Laia turned to the Temeba as water seeks its level.

She had never feared or despised the city. It was her country. There would not be slums like this, if the Revolution prevailed. But there would be misery. There would always be misery, waste, cruelty. She had never pretended to be changing the human condition, to be Mama taking tragedy away from the children so they won't hurt themselves. Anything but. So long as people were free to choose, if they chose to drink flybane and live in sewers, it was their business. Just so long as it wasn't the business of Business, the source of profit and the means of power for other people. She had felt all that before she knew anything; before she wrote the first pamphlet, before she left Parheo, before she knew what 'capital' meant, before she'd been farther than River Street where she played rolltaggie kneeling on scabby knees on the pavement with the other six-year-olds. She had known it: that she, and the other kids, and her parents, and their parents, and the drunks and whores and all of River Street, was at the bottom of something—was the foundation, the reality, the source.

But will you drag civilisation down into the mud? cried the shocked decent people, later on, and she had tried for years to explain to them that if all you had was mud, then if you were God you made it into human beings, and if

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you were human you tried to make it into houses where human beings could live. But nobody who thought he was better than mud would understand. Now, water seeking its level, mud to mud, Laia shuffled through the foul, noisy street, and all the ugly weakness of her old age was at home. The sleepy whores, their lacquered hair-arrangements dilapidated and askew, the one-eyed woman wearily yelling her vegetables to sell, the halfwit beggar slapping flies, these were her countrywomen. They looked like her, they were all sad, disgusting, mean, pitiful, hideous. They were her sisters, her own people.

She did not feel very well. It had been a long time since she had walked so far, four or five blocks, by herself, in the noise and push and stinking summer heat of the streets. She had wanted to get to Koly Park, the triangle of scruffy grass at the end of the Temeba, and sit there for a while with the other old men and women who always sat there, to see what it was like to sit there and be old; but it was too far. If she didn't turn back now, she might get a dizzy spell, and she had a dread of falling down, falling down and having to lie there and look up at the people come to stare at the old woman in a fit. She turned and started home, frowning with effort and self-disgust. She could feel her face very red, and a swimming feeling came and went in her ears. It got a bit much, she was really afraid she might keel over. She saw a doorstep in the shade and made for it, let herself down cautiously, sat, sighed.

Nearby was a fruit-seller, sitting silent behind his dusty, withered stock. People went by. Nobody bought from him. Nobody looked at her. Odo, who was Odo? Famous revolutionary, author of *Community, The Analogy,* etc. etc. She, who was she? An old woman with grey hair and a red face sitting on a dirty doorstep in a slum, muttering to herself.

True? Was that she? Certainly it was what anybody passing her saw. But was it she, herself, any more than the famous revolutionary, etc., was? No. It was not. But who was she, then?

The one who loved Taviri.

Yes. True enough. But not enough. That was gone; he had been dead so long.

"Who am I?" Laia muttered to her invisible audience, and they knew the answer and told it to her with one voice. She was the little girl with scabby knees, sitting on the doorstep staring down through the dirty golden haze of River Street in the heat of late summer, the six-year-old, the sixteen-year-old, the fierce, cross, dream-ridden girl, untouched, untouchable. She was herself. Indeed she had been the tireless worker and thinker, but a bloodclot in a vein had taken that woman away from her. Indeed she had been the lover, the swimmer in

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the midst of life, but Taviri, dying, had taken that woman away with him. There was nothing left, really, but the foundations. She had come home; she had never left home. "True voyage is return." Dust and mud and a doorstep in the slums. And beyond, at the far end of the street, the field full of tall dry weeds blowing in the wind as night came.

"Laia! What are you doing here? Are you all right?"

One of the people from the House, of course, a nice woman, a bit fanatical and always talking. Laia could not remember her name though she had known her for years. She let herself be taken home, the woman talking all the way. In the big cool common-room (once occupied by tellers counting money behind polished counters supervised by armed guards) Laia sat down in a chair. She was unable just as yet to face climbing the stairs, though she would have liked to be alone. The woman kept on talking, and other excited people came in. It appeared that a demonstration was being planned. Events in Thu were moving so fast that the mood here had caught fire, and something must be done. Day after tomorrow, no, tomorrow, there was to be a march, a big one, from Old Town to Capitol Square—the old route. "Another Ninth Month Uprising," said a young man, fiery and laughing, glancing at Laia. He had not even been born at the time of the Ninth Month Uprising, it was all history to him. Now he wanted to make some history of his own. The room had filled up. A general meeting would be held here, tomorrow, at eight in the morning. "You must talk, Laia."

"Tomorrow? Oh, I won't be here tomorrow," she said brusquely. Whoever had asked her smiled, another one laughed, though Amai glanced round at her with a puzzled look. They went on talking and shouting. The Revolution. What on earth had made her say that? What a thing to say on the eve of the Revolution, even if it was true.

She waited her time, managed to get up and, for all her clumsiness, to slip away unnoticed among the people busy with their planning and excitement. She got to the hall, to the stairs, and began to climb them one by one. "The general strike," a voice, two voices, ten voices were saying in the room below, behind her. "The general strike," Laia muttered, resting for a moment on the landing. Above, ahead, in her room, what awaited her? The private stroke. That was mildly funny. She started up the second flight of stairs, one by one, one leg at a time, like a small child. She was dizzy, but she was no longer afraid to fall. On ahead, on there, the dry white flowers nodded and whispered in the open fields of evening. Seventy-two years and she had never had time to learn what they were called. ★

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THE COMPANY OF GLORY

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PROLOGUE

Dear Jim:

Here are the remarks you suggested as a sort of prologue to *COMPANY OF GLORY*. Luckily pre-dinner speakers are under some control, because like their victims they want to get on with the eating.

In my novel DAVY, that red-headed kid's troubles began when he was born in the 303rd year after the collapse of what we describe as 20th Century culture. He and most of his contemporaries believed that during a period after the collapse which they called the Years of Confusion no trustworthy records were kept. But he grew up in Moha, where they don't know any better. In such a place as Nuber in Katskil, founded directly in the ashes, there would always have been some clerk who could tell the politicians just what day of what week of what year it was—and be right, too. And this story, which in a way grew backward out of DAVY, belongs to the Year 47, when a number of people such as Demetrios and Mam Estelle could well remember that age which was already being called Old Time, and count the years.

As in DAVY, there are no gadgets. My raw material is just People and Possibilities, and a touch of the Peculiar. In *COMPANY OF GLORY* outer space stays right where it was when we last looked, and creatures with eye-stalks remain at the bottom of the sea. The unexpected animals, here and in DAVY, could all be there without even a whisper about mutation. This is true of the other stories derived from the world that began, in the literary sense, with DAVY—TIGER BOY, THE NIGHTWIND, THE FRESHMAN ANGLE, MY BROTHER LEOPOLD; also THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE and the other stories still to appear in Putnam's "Continuum" series. Making a world is a pleasant occupation, and I hope I've been reasonably consistent without too many goofs. It's an occupation we all carry on, I notice, one way or another, and that's one thing that gives me hope for the damned human race.

As for the Peculiar—well, it's here too. An element of fantasy has come into this story—I use that kicked-around word because I don't know of any other—and I can't apologize for it. There's a fog with a character in it some of us have met, and curious things happen, and symbolism was always up to the reader—all the author can do is brush his hands smugly and walk away. In the game of drawing the line between poetry and prose, I don't play. (And damn it, *all* fiction is fantasy, including campaign speeches, book reviews, and seed catalogs.) For most of the weirdities in COMPANY OF GLORY a solemn "realistic" explanation could be worked out, I guess, but my most loving friends will be those willing to relax and enjoy it. I'd like to deserve one thing that Huck Finn said of Mr. Mark Twain: "There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth."

Best,
Edgar

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I

There will be Love in it

If I missed my other glimpses of infinity I may find it in a blade of grass. —*DEMETRIOS*

THE OLD MAN swung his walnut stick, enjoying the heft of it but not dependent on it; he was no more blind than Homer. Ambling down Harrow Street, he encountered a boy leading a horse to the blacksmith, and some girls who had toiled up from the creek with laundry baskets. "A good day to you, Garth. How's Frankie?"

"And to you, Demetrios," the boy said, smiling with warmth and shyness. "Frankie he's fine." Garth stood idly rubbing his horse's neck, watchful of the girls in their damp smocks, who had set down their baskets and were poking at their hair, but he was mindful of the old man too. No one ignored the story-teller.

Demetrios' peregrine face appeared to fly toward you even when motionless. His long right hand, prominent in the joints, might rest on his walnut staff and still point toward the outlands, the foreign visions. Demetrios stood tall—advantageous for one gazing over preoccupied heads. His gray hair, lightly silvered, fell straight to his shoulders. He was sixty, not old but seasoned, like his walnut stick, like a wine held long enough in the cask to have ripened in a way that might not suit everyone. The boy Garth, at an age when a good heart's love must flow outward, adored him—what other ancient would remember a stable-boy's name and his little brother too? And some were caught by Demetrios' professional skill as a story-teller, neither liking nor disliking him but granting some tribute of listening. A girl named Solitaire desired him and was desired.

From a side-street a peddlar, a ragpicker older than Demetrios, pushed his two-wheel barrow near them and rested it on its one-leg stand, mopping his face with a grimy cloth. The afternoon hung heavy with July; a wind heaving gray masses through the mountain air was not felt here, not yet, though before long a thunderstorm might drop on the meager makeshift town, stirring the mud, trash, and sewage in Nuber's streets and flushing a portion of the filth down the channels of the central ditches, shifting corruption from one spot to another as human society has done so long, so long. Time-beaten himself and practised in impudence—(any publicity is good publicity, they used to say in Old Time, so I'm told, until they choked on it)—the peddler felt privileged to croak: "Dimmy, you old blast of wind! Got a story for us—one with balls to it?"

"Yours hanging low, Potterfield?" Demetrios' softer tone could have been heard sixty feet down the block. One of the girls giggled, spreading a laundry-pink hand over her mouth and watching Garth, who blushed easily; he wasn't over fifteen. Raised to reach the back row of a crowd, Demetrios' baritone sometimes sounded high in pitch. He had sung a little once, until a musician told him his

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ear was not quite true. His voice was better for spoken dreams. A woman leaned generously from a first-floor window with a dust-cloth over her hair, and Demetrios asked: "May I sit myself here, Mam, while I tell you a tale of some sort if you want one?"

"The ssph—" she spat a peach-pit into the sunken entry-way below her window and settled herself—"the steps a'n't ourn, we only rent. Sit anyhow and tell your tale, dear soul. I'll fight any sunny-bitch says you can't."

"So maybe I'll make it a tale for you, and there will be love in it, and Potterfield must put up with it."

"I got no cause against love," grumbled Potterfield, "as the fly said when his poor arse got jammed into the honey."

Demetrios sat in the shade and rested his hands on the knob of his walnut stick, and shut his eyes a summoning while, watching the midnight ocean of memory and reflection for whatever cargo might seek the industrious wharves and warehouses of his mind. He knew a familiar fear, that on this day no ships had sailed: such days do arrive to afflict us. "I was a child," he said. "I think I've told no tales of childhood. There was once—no, not that one. Let me mull it over. Wind's in the east—that's not one of the fair-blowing winds . . . All stories begin in childhood. Before speech.

"HEAR then that I who talk to you was born in a small town that might seem large to you. Its population was about three thousand—before the Twenty-Minute War, which marks the Year One of our calendar. And I suppose the present population here in the city of Nuber is hardly more than that—four thousand possibly, four thousand loyal subjects of the King's republic," he said, and nobody laughed.

"My birth-town was named Hesterville, and it was not many miles up a great river from the city of Hannibal in what was the state of Missouri. Missouri's a long way west—no matter if you never heard of it. A man named Sam Clemens was born at Hannibal, by the way, one hundred and forty-five years before my birth at Hesterville. I think of him because he was a story-teller too, but a great one. His tales were written in books, the books multiplied to thousands—that's called printing and you've heard of it; I'm told there's a hand press here at Nuber, I mean another besides the legal one they use in the Inner City. So Clemens' stories were read and preserved all over the world, which was larger then, dear souls, and quite round. He wrote them under the invented name of Mark Twain, better known than his original name. Names are important: with them we can talk to each other, a little. Mark Twain's stories will last, unless all books are lost and destroyed; even then bits of them will be told for a while. My stories are written on the air. Who knows where a story goes after the poet gives it to the winds?"

Then, I know, the old man brooded, on whether to give them some of Huck Finn's tale—*The contexts are gone. There was a*

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slavery in 1993, but the method and the idiom of it were altogether different. It was supervised by po-faced experts who gave it the name of Temporary Suspension of Normalcy. What could these ignorant friendly folk make of openly admitted slavery? Or of Nigger Jim? "All right, I'll GO to Hell!"—what could they make of that? Contexts gone. As for Huck's antebellum world, lost so long ago that even to my boyhood reading it seemed remoter than Pan's Arcadia—why, of that they might understand a little if I could transmit it to them. It is nearer to us than it was at any time in the 20th Century, now that the flabby plastic carcass of industrialism is buried. Gradually the air loses that foulness; the earth, and even the tortured and degraded sea, begin to regain some of the beauty that dollar-progress ravaged and smeared. There's loss too. So be it. If I missed my other glimpses of infinity I may find it in a blade of grass.

HE KNEW he had been keeping silent too long. He opened his eyes and beamed on his audience with a practised shrewdness, to let them know he had not dozed off senile and forgetful. They were attentive; one or two smiled back. Others had strolled up during his abstraction—he had been aware of their coming but had wanted to follow his thought further. In a time when literacy is rare the storyteller and newsbearer come into their own and the memories of some listeners develop astonishing powers. Demetrios studied the little crowd, some of the faces dubiously familiar but all without names except the plump sweet face of Garth.

In the canvas cap that he had dropped upside down near his feet a few coins were lying. Most of these were the brass pennies of the King's Republic of Katskil, crudely stamped with the slab-jawed face of Brian II. (Like his father Brian I, he called his monarchy a Provisional Government, its holy aim the restoration of the United States of America, which alas was not quite practical right *now*.) Among the pennies shone a startling fragment of the past, accepted legal tender but a great rarity, an Old-Time silver dime worth at least fifty of the Katskil pennies. Who in this group would have been that munificent?

It was almost certainly the dark-haired youth who sat apart from the rest holding the leash of a gray wolfhound. His linen tunic and loincloth were cream-white, unofficial sign of the aristocracy; though not a matter of law, none but they wore the expensive bleached linen in public; commoners put up with clothes slung together by the inexpert housewife or sweatshop serf from ill-woven drab-colored wool, or linsey-woolsey—wool and linen remnants and scraps. The aristocracy took pride in cleanness, while on some other levels dirt was equated with virtue. This youth's deerhide hip satchel and moccasins would have been made by the bonded servants, virtually slaves, who did such labor for the Inner City and the large estates in the suburbs. The boy's direct and innocent gaze troubled Demetrios, who was haunted by another world dead

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for nearly half a century. "I think a story goes wherever there's a spark of hearing life. In Hesterville we had those devices that seem fairy-tale fancies to anyone too young to have seen them. Nobody here except Potterfield would recall them as I do—telephones, automobiles, radio, earth-moving machines, aircraft. Naturally you find it hard to believe in them. Remember space flight, Potterfield?"

"Shit," said the peddler. "Made that one up, di'n't they? I never seen no sacklite go up except like on the teevy same as them other space-opries with made-up people."

"What happened to your teevy?" asked the dark-haired boy.

"Busted," said Potterfield. "Busted, sir. See, when the power went bleh, wouldn't nothing work." He winked at Demetrios, sharing an ancient half-wisdom gone useless and sour. "So my girl friend flang a bottle of hand lotion into it—an empty one. Was her teevy actually. Was shacking up with her at the time, fifty years ago nearabout. I'm seventy now by Jesus, since you ask."

"You remember the cars too," said Demetrios. "Remember the telephones? Jet planes?"

"Of course. Even now if I have to gosemplace I think, oh, I'll just phone, and then I think, well, shit." Potterfield scratched under his soggy loin-rag, irritated by many griefs, old age not the least of them. Crab-lice, rats, and fleas had survived the long-ago holocaust abundantly. During the last two or three decades, as the risen waters held their level with only slight fluctuations, a small aggressive variety of short-tailed rat was doing especially well—dark-pelted, savage, with a liking for the new human dwellings that were no longer set up on concrete foundations. It might be a sport from the prolific meadow-mouse of Old Time, Demetrios thought, but there was no one to discuss it with him who would even know the word "genetics". "Better off, ain't we?" said Potterfield. He would have been about twenty, Demetrios reflected, when fire scourged the cities and the short plagues followed, radiation deaths and epidemics of crushing virulence with no means for study or control. The great Red Plague did not come until sixteen years later, when Demetrios was twenty-nine, and living at Nuber. Potterfield must have been a simple young man (if any human being ever answered that description) with a hunger for simple satisfactions (if there are any satisfactions that don't spread like pond ripples to infinity). There had been so many like him! Male and female of all ages, passing four billion by the estimates of 1990, in spite of a slight drop in the birth rate and the desolating famines of the late 1970's and early 1980's. "Better off, not so much crap all the time flying at you. Man has a chance to think," said Potterfield. "You wouldn't believe the amount of deep thinking I get through nowadays. Get on with your story, Dimmy—I set down here to be entertained, di'n't I?"

"YOU SHALL be, if you stay awake. I grew up in that world," said Demetrios, "to the age

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of thirteen, not comfortable, for nobody was then except the unthinking, who can be comfortable on the side of a volcano. Being a child, of course I was often unthinking too. I—"

"Aw, Demetrios!" The woman in the window had finished her peach and wiped her mouth on her arm. "Volcano? You got to use all them big words? What's a volcano?"

"Sorry, Mam. A volcano is a mountain with a hole in its top. From time to time the hole lets out the fire of the earth, in a molten river that rolls down the mountain burning everything. Did you know, my darling, the inside of the earth is a core of fire? Every day you walk above a cellar of *fire,* my darling. Now no more questions or I stop my tale." But it was the boy Garth who showed alarm and even glanced sheepishly down toward his feet; the woman was only amused and not believing. "Yes, I grew up in that world, my father a doctor and a wise man. My mother was a painter of pictures. There are some in Nuber; she was more skillful than any you know—and had better materials to work with of course. My father was known as Dr. Isaac Freeman of Hesterville, and my name—why, my name was Adam Freeman. I have not told of these things before." *And what comes over you now, to go so falteringly toward the telling of them?—They don't want this, Demetrios. They want romances, fairy-tales, even allegory if you're careful—words to ease the sting of daily hardships, but certainly not the story of how things really were! Well, the wind is in the east.* "I must feel my way, dear souls. My name was not then Demetrios. It was Adam Freeman.

"My name has been Demetrios for forty-seven years—long enough to have seen these near waters rise and become the Hudson Sea. I have beheld one more messiah, seventeen years ago, and his martyrdom by those he sought to save. I speak of the man Abraham whom some call prophet, bound on the wheel in Gallows Square of this town."

"Was he not a prophet?" asked the youth with the wolfhound. "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to interrupt."

"All men are prophets," said Demetrios, studying him. His presence here was only a little odd. Citizens of the Inner City, who could go wherever they pleased, were not uncommonly seen in the open streets, especially with protecting dogs or servants, and though they seldom bothered to pause for streetcorner storytellers, there was no reason to wonder at it. "And since men never agree, perhaps no man should have the name. My name is Demetrios. It means 'belonging to the earth'—'sacred to the earth'. In ancient times a goddess Demeter was worshipped as the spirit of the earth, the all-mother—worshipped under other names too. Demeter was the name given her by the Greeks—you know of them, sir?"

The boy looked bothered, perhaps by the "sir" from one so much older; but most people wearing such linen would take it as their natural right. "I do know of them," he said, and smiled, not arrogantly. "I know some of the books."

Demetrios nodded. "Then you will have found there's life in them.

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I am Demetrios. If anyone called me on the street by that name Adam Freeman I might not understand it was meant for me. My father used to call me Ad; to my mother, who was Welsh, I was Adam-bach.

"I was thirteen in the year 1993, old calendar. Now remember, dear souls, a whole continent extends to the west, north, and south of here—what the ocean hasn't submerged—and in that region our entire nation of Katskil would amount to a fingernail wedge of dirt on a big blanket. That's the vast region you're speaking of when you say 'United States of America'. Up to the year 1993, after which there's no written history we know of except for our little fingernail wedge, the rest of the world was marked off into other territorial divisions large and small—maybe it still is, but no one speaks across the oceans any more. Those divisions all called themselves nations, and were quite free to make war on each other with weapons that could turn the earth into a slag-heap—as it is today in many places, some not far from here. Nations and alliances of nations, dear souls, have not the mother-wit to avoid the stupid passion of war. Nations are no more capable of justice or charity than of love, for they are, essentially, organized crowds. Individual persons can love and be loved; they can be generous and kind, forbearing, even brave; nations, never. A crowd can neither think nor feel. Thinking is lonely work, dear souls, and feeling is the experience of the separate heart."

A close-faced man among the listeners made up his mind about something and walked away. His lingering image annoyed Demetrios; his features would have been hard to swear to on a second meeting—neutral, bland, cold.

"In 1993, at thirteen, I was reading the scanty censored newspaper from Chicago for what emerged between the lines, with my father's grim interpretations. We—my parents who treated me like a grown-up and I—we learned from radio and television what we were expected to think, so that we could appear to think it in the presence of strangers. We knew—"

"Look," said Potterfield, "you ain't telling no story, you're just beating your gums about old times—who needs it?"

"Ah, Potterfield! Once upon a time there were two little married people named Adam and Eve, and they had two little boys, one named Cain and—"

"Oh, *shit!* Forget I said anything."

"We knew the war would come, and in 1993 it came: the 24th day of June, 1993—according to an old religion which was even then rapidly fading, that was the day of St. John the Baptist, though I can't say whether anyone noticed it. The Twenty-Minute War we call it now, though actually I remember seeing a bomb-flare over the horizon on the second night. It's impossible to say which major division of the world had elected to try for suicide. We—"

"Why, Christ," said Potterfield, "it was the Russians."

"So you were told automatically

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by the teevy until the power went off. I remember a broadcast from South America on our car radio, accusing us. The battery radio soon ran down, then the big silence. My guess is that the United States touched off the final lunacy, but does it matter now? Other nations were almost as rotten-ripe, the whole society watergated—"

"Jesus!" Potterfield lurched to his feet and grabbed the handle of his cart. "I won't sit around listening to no such wickedness as that." He rattled away, halting at the corner to thrust his hand toward Demetrios, fingers pronged against the evil eye.

Mainly for the dark-haired boy, Demetrios remarked: "There goes maybe the last American patriot." One of the four laundry girls got up to go, but her companion checked her dubiously.

Garth let his old plug clump a step or two nearer. "Old Potterfield never had no sense."

"Ay," said Demetrios, "that's what makes him different from you and me." The woman in the window seemed undisturbed. "The bombs were for the great cities and launching areas. One direct hit obliterated Chicago, two hundred and fifty miles from Hesterville. The bombs were of the kind described, in the insane jargon of the age, as 'clean'. This meant simply that they killed more people by impact and fire than by a poisoning of the atmosphere that the senders of the bombs might have found inconvenient—for they had persistent delusions about staying alive while they defended freedom or whatever the hell they were doing. I suppose

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all through history people have imagined that giving horror a pretty name makes it no longer horror.

"I have made up my mind. I will tell you how I acquired the name of Demetrios, and only that story. Never mind the cars, airplanes, bombs, all that trash. You've heard of it before: let it rust. And bear with me: in order to tell the story about my name I must say a little more about the ending of Old Time.

"There were the short plagues, sicknesses that raged for a few days and passed like firestorms, leaving their dead. Different from the radiation deaths."

"Red Plague?" said the dark haired boy.

"No, that came sixteen years later, only—let me think—thirty-one years ago. No, the short plagues—they may have come from the war laboratories, our own likely, torn apart and scattered. Such methods of warfare were supposed to have been discontinued much earlier, but that happy announcement had been made by a government that lied about virtually all its other activities, and later—this was before my time—later it developed that the Pentagon's only concern was to develop gases and diseases that would be safe for the users to handle—you know, *clean* ways of destroying other people who were so inconsiderate as to be foreigners."

"Pentagon?"

"Oh—that was the nightmare building in the city of Washington that housed the war machine—called, of course, the Defense Department. Yes, I think it's likely the short plagues were man-made, but you understand, there was neither time nor means to study them when they were destroying us. Certainly the military mind is incapable of abandoning such toys.

"We let that mind win, by default. We overpopulated the earth, spawning to the point of famine, exhausting natural resources with no restraint, no thought for future needs, and piling up corruption. Our breed grew like a tumor. The surgery that ended the overgrowth was performed, not by reason as it might have been, but by famine, pestilence, and a war of idiots."

Round-eyed and indignant, the laundry girl who wanted to go snatched up her basket and dragged her friend along with her. If the people of Nuber believed anything in these years, they believed that the King's Republic was engaged in the imminent restoration of the United States of America and the Golden Age. But the other two girls lingered, and Garth, and a tired friendly-faced woman with a market basket, and a young couple hand in hand who might not have been listening much, and the dark-haired boy with the wolfhound. The dog stretched and yawned open his fearsome teeth, laughing with a big pink tongue.

"And that surgery was presently aided," said Demetrios, "by the sterility and birth deformities brought on by radiation—from atomic industry as well as weapons—which may pursue us for another thousand years, or five thousand, if we can last that long."

"I bore a mue two years ago," said the woman in the window. "He

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had no anus. Lived a day. I ha'n't conceived since. Nor tried to prevent it. My husband says it's all God's punishment on us."

"A woman who was like a wife to me long ago," said Demetrios, "Elizabeth of Hartford, conceived a mue with a swollen eggshell skull. It cracked during the delivery that destroyed her own life. Now what do you imagine you did to be so punished, Mam?"

"We don't know. My husband says it'll all be explained with the coming of the Messiah, and he could come like anybody, you know. Like that Abraham. Like you, yourself it is."

"Nay-nay, I'm a rusty storyteller, nothing more."

"Then get on with the story about your name, dear soul."

II

A Music of Surviving Birds

. . . For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life.

—Herman Melville, MOBY DICK.

"My name is Demetrios.

"My father and mother died within hours of each other, in coma following a few hours of paroxysmal cramps and high fever—I have no name for the sickness. In the uncanny manner of the short plagues, I was untouched, though death prevailed all around me and hardly any were left to attempt the burials. Perhaps I and a few others had a light infection of the same thing, whatever it was. That's only speculation, for science as men had known it was ended. Civilization ended with a writhing in the streets and a stillness.

"Hesterville had been a town of about three thousand. A few weeks after the Twenty-Minute War I don't suppose more than five hundred were left alive. Can you imagine the empty houses and the reek of death? A hot July: the earth steamed to the sun through short intermissions of intolerable rains—Christ, the rains!—but it was hot rain that did nothing to lighten the corruption it could not wash away. A listless, sodden, windless rain; the sky was bleeding water like a sacrifice.

"One person left alone, as I was, could survive only as a slinking animal. Food was where you found it, all shadows a threat and all strangers. Our house where my parents lay dead was looted by a gang of half a dozen louts who ran through the remnants of our town like a twister off the plains. I escaped them unseen. Later I saw a couple of them shot down from a window by someone with a repeating rifle, who I suppose took the law on himself because it existed nowhere else; they twitched a while under the rain.

"Hesterville—why, I think it's under water now. Sometimes a dream takes me to it, a place of whitened bones; once, in that way, I found it a place of seaweed wavering, swaying over a white statue that stood benign but unanswering in the green depth—it looked like my mother and I would have em-

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braced it but the water held me away like impenetrable glass.

"The day after I escaped the looters I took the road out of Hesterville, without a goal and hungry. Government, I knew, did not exist. You know most of the important things at thirteen—the rest is comment and filling-in. Can I make it understandable? You and I, all of us, dear souls, are used to government of a sort here at Nuber, maybe too much. There's been more continuity here than in most places, ever since the Twenty-Minute War and the other disasters. People preserve government in some form because they must. True anarchy's intolerable: the wolves, the wild deer, don't live in anarchy, they follow strict laws, some of them even self-imposed, and the law-breakers usually perish. Well, forty-seven years ago, at Hesterville and a million other places, government for a short while was wholly smashed, a gone mechanism. I escaped into a nearly silent world, but I knew that wherever I should encounter human eyes hell might be simmering behind them.

"I walked some miles before I came on a car slantwise across the road—I'm speaking of an Old-Time motor vehicle, an automobile. Cars were no longer numerous in 1993; the great swarm of them was before my time. The seventy-year gasoline joyride sputtered out to a silly finish in the 1970s; alternative methods were developing, and could have amounted to something in time but got off to a bad start, partly because the oil and automobile companies had too long prevented any rational trial and research along that line, partly because of a general sag of energy—I mean human energy. What we called civilization had pretty well worn us out . . . In that stalled car a well-dressed man was slumped lifeless across the wheel and there was a dead baby in the rear seat. Sickness must have struck him while he drove—no mark of violence. He may have hoped that being on the move would help; Americans used to believe that activity, however aimless and wrong-headed, must be a good in itself. The bodies were not convulsed. That had passed for my people also, during the coma; I think those two died from the same destroyer. Once sentient flesh, they had come to a certain position in time and space, and there ceased, with quiet faces. I took some of the food I found in the car. I remember a music of surviving birds."

"BLESS them!" said the woman in the window.

"Yes, in 1993 non-human life was recovering, here and there, from the ravages of industry. There was no such morning music as we can enjoy now, but they sang. In forty-seven years, Mam, I think a few more species have died out from the long-lasting poisons but others have survived and multiplied. In our vanity we still imagine it's for us they sing. I wish there were robins.

"Later that day I heard a bell tinkle behind me when the rain was briefly quieting, and a boy and girl rode up on bicycles. They were fresh-faced and kind, and after a

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first stare, not afraid of me. The girl said: "We're friends, man—don't be spookered." They were, and remained so. That was Laura Wilmot, and the boy was George Wilmot, her cousin. They were acting as advance scouts for a group of seven people who were following the leadership of a rugged old man, Judd Wilmot—Laura's uncle, George's father—and they told me as soon as they knew I was alone, without any other questioning, that I was one of them.

"Their kindness broke me down. 'Why, cry it out!' says Laura, and opened her raincoat and mine, to hug me. 'What's your name?' 'Adam,' I said. 'Well, dear Father Adam,' said Laura, to make me laugh; and George who never said much was making kind noises. I was a small snip of thirteen just beginning a spurt of growth. George was nineteen I think, large and bland.

"Judd Wilmot I would call a natural commander. He also was kind, in his own fashion, and possessed organizing sense, ability to guide and give orders. Fanatic: an idea once stuck in his skull couldn't be dislodged. One of these ideas was a conviction, heaven knows the source, that things must be better to the east of us and he would prove it if it meant going all the way to the Atlantic and jumping in. He could be severe, as a commander must, and either he never had any sense of humor or it was shocked out of him by the horrors of the time. I never knew him to be mean or stupid or unjust.

"There was Judd's wife Miranda, soft and self-effacing, and Judd's gloomy younger brother Howard who was Laura's father, a widow named Andromache Makarios—she had been a neighbor of the Wilmots in their Kansas town—and Andromache's eighteen-year-old son Demetrios.

"Within a few months, by the way, those bicycles were as useless as the cars. Tires and bearings—no replacements. Last drop of machine oil—no replacement. That's how a world ran down, in a clutter of midget failures after the large ones, leaving us more helpless than people of ancient times who never dreamed of an industrial age.

"Andromache was lonely and passionate, perhaps always had been. Her husband, one of the few who still tried to live by farming instead of mining the exhausted earth for dollars, had died on the day of the Twenty-Minute War—of a heart attack. Like all who survived the disasters—including myself, she was still in shock. I remember more than once she fell behind, and halting for her we saw her just standing with her face uplifted to the rain; and Judd, or Demetrios, would go back to rouse her from the partial trance. She had not given up, and would not while she could cling to Demetrios, and Demetrios at eighteen understood that. After we became friends he told me he had been on the point of leaving home, longing to, breaking the chains of gossamer as he called it himself, a son's necessary escape. His father had been well able to care for fey Andromache, and wanted him to go for his own sake; but now that comprehending man was dead, and so was the world.

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"How shall I give you an image of that Demetrios who was my friend, who seemed so marvelously old to me then and now would seem like a boy? Judd and Howard both commented on a likeness between us as strong as if we had been brothers, though Laura said she couldn't see it. We were both dark, with this straight high-bridged nose and full underlip; maybe that's all it amounted to. When I remember his face I see no image of myself, but another person whom I loved as a very separate being.

"Andromache and I were uneasy with each other. What she felt I've never known; what I felt was a tension that affected me like hostility but may have been nothing of the kind. Dark and small she was, and must have been approaching forty, though in her girlish slenderness she looked to me hardly any older than wonderful Demetrios.

"I think Judd Wilmot was very little aware of the complex of emotions—not all of them young emotions—that swirled among us. We were caught up in his own fantasy about the eastern states—dear man, he'd been born in Vermont, though only five when his family moved west—because we had no stronger contrary notions and no such force of determination. Out of love and respect for him, we stayed on our good behavior in his presence. Antique he was, prudish, almost like a survival from the 19th Century of Old Time, or rather from what I imagine the 19th Century to have been.

"DEMETRIOS, before the crash, had determined to become a motion picture director. That meant the one who planned and managed the creation of those images in motion—you will have heard of them and I won't stop to explain how photography worked, though I did understand it once—which provided a great part of the entertainment of 20th Century people. In my boyhood, motion pictures had established the possibilities of a great art form, the only one the industrial age originated, in fact the only basic inovation in the arts since the start of oil painting in the late middle ages, and the early working out of systems of harmony and counterpoint at about the same time. Demetrios grasped these possibilities. He was a youth, he had grown up on a Kansas farm (but his farmer father was well-read), and he had seen movies mainly through the medium of the teevy. But still he sensed the vast area of dramatic art that had to exist behind the poverty of what he saw in the corrupted boob tube, and his heart had been set on entering that world of creation and liberating his own fresh marvels in it. He could have done it I think.

"When I met him and made a hero out of him, he was not accepting the wreck of our society as a final thing. Rational about everything else, he clung somehow to a quite irrational conviction that when our people restored the framework of society, the complex of mechanical production that supported the making of motion pictures would naturally be reactivated along with it. He forgot (and I was no wiser) that the cinema was the only major art that depended for its

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existence on the sophisticated engineering of an industrial age. There can be great music without pianos or complex keyed wind instruments. Give a painter or sculptor his basic materials, however crude, and the visual arts can live. But Demetrios' art had been cut at the roots. Understanding the creative side, he had scant knowledge of the engineering aspect—hadn't looked into it yet, he told me; knowing less than he did, I took his word for that, and went along unquestioning. I see now that he probably knew better: it was a willful blindness.

"Worshipping his least word, I was happy to fling myself into—well, we called them rehearsals, and often had the half-reluctant help of George and Laura. Occasionally Andromache got into them too, at Demetrios' begging, but inevitably she conveyed an impression of humoring the child, allowing her sad amusement to be glimpsed. Like many mothers she loved her son, with little or no respect for him.

"Demetrios would direct us out of his one-volume Shakespeare, our only book on that journey. He would storm at us and labor over our performance of what we barely understood, with fierce insistence on the reality of dramatic illusion. To him (and to me) Macbeth, Lear, Rosalind, Falstaff, all the glorious company were as real as Judd or George or Laura or myself; more real, because immortal. I still like to think, dear souls, that Hamlet's perplexities will be under discussion long after I'm dead.

"So, like a company of players without an audience, we groped our way from Missouri as far as Pennsylvania—it took us two months, well into September, but it's true we had no reason for haste—before anything happened to burst the bubble of Demetrios' dream. Maybe some of the intensity he brought to those rehearsals was appropriate to an earlier phase of youth; solemn folk, like Howard Wilmot, would say he should have grown up sooner. But if it resembled a child's fantasy it was carried out with the prodigal passion of an adolescent who was in most respects a man, and an artist from the heart out.

"In a way, I hold Howard Wilmot to blame, yet according to his lights what he did was well meant. Judd, though I don't think he would have done it himself, did nothing to prevent it, only stood by and let it happen, not understanding until too late.

"We were in a town somewhere near Harrisburg, a wholly deserted town where a soft insistent southwest wind was driving the rain down along the desolation of Main Street, a swarm of silver ghosts. The little town was all ours to do with as we chose; in that September it was still possible to find canned stuff in the groceries or the forsaken dwellings, though perhaps in the company of the disintegrating dead. In that valley town, though—I remember the name of it, it was Aberedo—everything had been left tidy. Perhaps the survivors of plagues and war had abandoned it in fear of flood—for a river ran through the place, roaring high to the banks—and had chosen to leave their bit of the world in good

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order. We took refuge from the rain as we had done at many other towns, in a public building. It was a motion picture theatre, and it was Howard who suggested it.

"We had used one before, much earlier, when Demetrios and I had explored the place top to bottom, and used the stage area for a rehearsal of Othello; but this time Howard took it on himself to show Demetrios. He steered us up to the projection booth, and made it all his show—Judd was there, and Andromache came too, and Howard lectured with the obdurate wisdom of a garage mechanic. 'This here is a reel, Demmy,' he said. 'That there is a projector—look at the God-damn thing, more parts than a fine car.' Howard was fed up with the rehearsals; they bothered him; they were a waste of time—though I don't know what he hoped to do with the time saved—and I think he also felt that some of the language in Shakespeare wasn't quite nice. 'This here box that holds the projection lamp, see, this is a real special metal, built to stand heat. I been told the heat of them lamps is a caution, and they was pretty special too, I don't guess there'd be a soul alive knows how to make one, supposing he had the makings. See, it ain't like this, now, organic gardening, I mean a man can take a piece of land and grow things, but see, there ain't no living to be made out of this.' He was trying to be kind, or thought he was, and I hadn't the courage to tell him to shut up. 'See, Demmy, you take that reel of film for instance, you know what that film is made of? Plastic. You know what plastic is made of? It's a p'troleum product. All plastics is p'troleum products,' said Howard, who had read an article about it. 'Thing of it is, Demmy, moo'n' pictures has had it. Of course, so long as it's just a game—'

"'Well,' said my friend agreeably, 'I will cease my games.' And he went down into the theatre, walking naturally, no one with him but me, and I felt his pain in a way that made it impossible for me to speak. Then he was hurrying to the door, and out in the rain, and running, and I ran after him, but I couldn't keep up to him, I couldn't make him stop by screaming to him, he ran out on the bridge over the muddy torrent of the river, and climbed the rail, and was gone. He couldn't swim. I could; I kicked off my shoes and went in after him—hopeless of course, the current had wrenched him far downstream, and down. I must have wanted to die myself, or I wouldn't have been foolish enough to try it; then I suppose the natural animal part of me was not ready to die. I remember catching hold of something, a timber I guess, and forcing my way somehow to the bank a quarter-mile or so downstream, where George and Judd found me and carried me home. I wasn't unconscious, just exhausted. I knew all about it when Andromache flung herself on me and kissed me and cried: 'O Demetrios—thank God, Demetrios! Poor Adam's gone then? Demetrios, I'm so *sorry!* I know how you loved him, Demetrios, I know."

I think Judd Wilmot said: "Andromache, God is not mocked."

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But that was the only time he reproved her, seeing that the rest of us had said nothing, and I don't think she heard it at all.

"She never relinquished the illusion, and from the start we had been used to softening everything for Andromache. It was for myself a kind of madness, if you like, to take the name of someone I had loved so much, and in a way become that person, but—one grows accustomed, even to madness. It seemed to take away nothing from the ancient part of life that was Hesterville; I even imagined my real mother approving of what I did. We came on, we settled here at Nuber where a working order was already established and stayed together as a group for a short while, about six months I think it was, before Andromache died. Then Judd elected to take the rest on to Vermont—he never liked Nuber, found it godless—but I elected to remain here and have done so ever since, telling you stories from time to time, and earning my living as a respectable janitor.

"Andromache had one other trouble of the mind—more than one, but one that I'll tell you about because it seems to be part of the story. She had never read books—for her the teevy took the place of them. But some legends out of books had come to her, and woke her curious power of belief. After I had become Demetrios, or Demetrios had become myself—I don't know what way I should say it—Andromache spoke a great deal about Tom Sawyer, as if he were someone she had known until recently; but in her mind Mark Twain's great creation strayed far from the original, taking on qualities of Lancelot and the dead Demetrios and Jesus. Here at Nuber she sat about and daydreamed a great deal; she did not talk aloud to Tom Sawyer, but her expression would shift and change in a thousand ways as if she carried on a conversation with everything but voice. And often she wandered away, but never got into trouble and always came back—we grew careless. She became interested in collecting herbs and would bring back basketfuls of this and that, usually dandelion or plantain or similar good harmless things, but one day she brought in some pure white umbrella-shaped mushrooms. "O my God!" says Judd's wife Miranda, "them's Death Caps, you mustn't touch them things, Andy, good heavens!' 'Oh,' said Andromache, 'are they bad? Throw them out then,' she said, and giggled. 'If they're bad we can't serve them when Tom Sawyer comes tomorrow.' And two days later she was talking to me in the cautious way she did, never looking me full in the face but repeatedly calling me Demetrios, when she became violently sick. Why, when she was talking with Miranda she must have already eaten some deathcaps—raw, I suppose, in the field.

"I never thought of becoming Adam Freeman again. Laura hesitantly called me Adam, a day after Andromache died; I shook my head. A sweet soul, Laura. I often wished we were closer, but the two-world she had with George was an

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old-fashioned kind that could make no room for a third. I am Demetrios—aye-so, and surely, for the janitor of a sex-house, Demetrios is a better name than Adam."

Behind his eyes Demetrios wished they would go. It had not been their kind of story—nor his, for that matter: it seemed to him he could tell dreams better than truth, whatever truth is. It had been forced from him without his conscious art, by the power of memory. He felt the sultry breeze, and his own weariness. "Sir?"

"Yes, Garth?"

"I just wondered if you was going to tell us more."

"Nay, no more. I dreamed last night that I was traveling west on a railroad, behind a steam locomotive with a big-bellied smokestack, something I never saw myself except in pictures. Long strings of cars there were, pulled along parallel steel tracks, they called them rails. There might be rusted remnants of those rails, here and there in the woods—nay, no more."

"My aunt has the sight—you know? She can read too, Demetrios. She's got this dream book where she says it tells like all what them things mean. I could ask her to look in it about yours."

"She might say I ought to make my westward journey."

"Once she told me out of the book how you could make like true dreams by putting rosemary and, well, things, under your pillow, I mean I did that and there was one, a you-know, one of those dreams, it was real great."

"They say it's wilderness now," said the young man with the wolfhound, "all the way west from Penn to some ocean—would that be what they called the Pacific, sir?"

"Might be," said Demetrios. "But since the Hudson has risen to become an inland sea, the Mississippi must have done the same, so that's likely the ocean they mean. An amazing rise, you know, for so short a time as half a century. At the Nuber waterfront they tell me the level's kept steady now for about five years. An inland sea would put Hesterville under water. Not much high ground there. Might be small islands."

BEHIND him someone asked: "Got a license for story-telling?"

The youth with the wolfhound stood up, murmuring reassurance to the rangy beast. Garth was viewing the newcomer, hands firm by the horse's head, his innocence suddenly shuttered behind blue eyes that looked older and dangerous. Demetrios turned his head without haste. The policeman had come softly in his moccasins, a stodgy decent soul known to Demetrios, in the uniform of dark blue loincloth and shirt with embroidered gold circle, his club at his belt. "They want a license for it now, Joe?"

"If you do it on the street. Constitutes collecting a crowd."

"Joe, I've been yarning on the streetcorners for at least fifteen years and you know it. You've stopped to listen yourself sometimes." Joe's embarrassment was a skim of ice on a pond in early frost. "It's my living, Joe, apart from janitor work."

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"Ain't been on the books long, sir. I won't take you in—we don't want no trouble. Only you got to get a license before you do it again. See about it at the Town Hall."

"What does it cost?"

Joe cleared his throat and looked away. "Ask'em at the Town Hall, ain't my department. Let's break it up, folks. No subversion. Can't have no crowds on Harrow Street."

"Joe Park," said the woman in the window, "you son of a bitch."

"Move on, folks. Break it up. We don't want no trouble."

III

But What is Peace?

Knowledge enormous makes a
a god of me..
Names, deeds, grey legends,
dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovran voices, agonie
Creations and destroyings, all
at once
Pour into the wide hollows of
my brain . . .
—Keats, HYPERION.

THE listeners dispersed. Demetrios tried to remember when that close-faced fellow had slipped away; it had been after those remarks about nations, persons, crowds, which might stir up that man's superiors—who would be at Inner City, he supposed.

As a good janitor, Demetrios wished to be law-abiding if only the law would show some sense. He had not the inner clench, akin to despair and vanity, that squeezes the revolutionary's mind. The police of the city-state of Nuber did not frighten Demetrios. He had rarely seen them misbehave. To be sure, he did not have a true worm's-eye view of them. In boyhood he had not felt much of the understandable 20th Century American hatred for police; his father's shrewd and tranquil sense of humor had steered him away from other excesses too.

Patrolman Joe Park, duty done, marched away, flipping a hand toward the woman in the window to acknowledge her insult. Demetrios rose with stiffness; quickly, unobtrusively, Garth's hand aided him. The plowhorse snuffled at Demetrios' neck. Garth muttered: "I hate the fucking cops, could shit in their beer." From gentle Garth, the words startled. "One of 'em beat up on Frankie last week, and he hadn't done nothing only pee a little on that statue in the Meadows, the one near the entrance, I guess it's St. Franklin, with the spade jaw. Lots of people do—screw a God-damn, Frankie's only twelve, they didn't have to beat up on him."

"Brand here can't get by that damn statue," said the youth with the wolfhound. "I don't think he'd mind the leash if I tried to stop him, so usually I have a shot at it too." The dog wagged gratification at the music of his name. "I'm Angus Bridgeman, sir."

"Peace with you, Angus, yourself it is," said Demetrios. "My name you know." His weariness was dissolving, as if the warmth of the young could flow into old bones and joints. "I suppose we'd best move on, in case Joe's got eyes in his back. And I must get to the

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Town Hall—but not today. I'll go home; I'm tired. Mam, was it a story with enough love in it?"

"Well, there was love in it. I'd ask you all in for a cup-tea, but the house is a mess and my man'll soon be home."

"Another time. Bless you."

"And you, man Demetrios. You be good boys." They moved off down the street. The woman's face saddened as a field goes drab when sunlight abandons it to roving cloud; she turned back to the work of the world.

—Here I who write this book must intrude an instant—no more than an instant I promise you and then I'm gone, out of sight—to say that this woman is no fiction—[0 stars in daytime, what is fiction?]—indeed I stayed a day or two at her house on my last return to Nuber, and wasn't she full of peace and quiet and pregnant again, wouldn't you know it? Real yes, but sensitive, does not wish her name to be used. Now I'm gone.—

"I gosemplace here," said Garth at the next corner. "Then I'll ask my aunt to see the book about your dream, Demetrios?"

"Do, Garth," said Demetrios, loving him. "And tell me."

"You was traveling west on a—a rail train."

"Aye-so, and it may have passed Aberedo, but that thought only nudged me like an owl's shadow under the moon."

"I'll see you again around and about."

"Yes, Garth, Peace."

"Peace, Demetrios, Mister Bridgeman." Garth was gone, his horse's hard steps receding with neat dry noise down Franklin Street, where bricks had replaced a decayed blacktop of Old Time. Harrow Street, with very little traffic of ox-carts and wagons, still had a usable amount of the ancient paving, its crumbled spots and frost-holes occasionally repaired, by order of Town Hall, with a random flurrup of dirt. Walking on with the quiet youth and his great gray dog, Demetrios brooded on the word *Peace.* One spoke it nowadays as we once said "So long" or "Be seeing you"—indeed the usage had begun long ago, before 1993, but in the 20th Century it seems to have had pious overtones, an assumption that only the religious could know the meaning of peace. Now no one gave it a thought, as for centuries no one had remembered that "Goodbye" derived from "God be with you!" But what is peace? Something more than the absence of strife and confusion?

"HAVE you truly been a storyteller for fifteen years? That is more than three-quarters of my lifetime."

"It must be about fifteen, Angus Bridgeman. You're about nineteen, yourself it is?"

"Next month."

"Live in health. Yes, so far as Nuber is concerned you could say I invented the profession of storytelling. The imitators flatter me—no, actually some are better than I am, I know."

"Isn't that false modesty? I don't think they are."

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"Maybe." The boy's quick, almost stern remark was like a directing tug on the arm. "There's a special vanity goes with the storytelling profession. My father, by the way, gave me a life-lasting example of intellectual humility, a rare quality in a doctor. Well—one afternoon I was idle on a street-corner, full of the myths of the world, and it—just happened. I said: 'Hear me who speak to you—' my voice sounded good to myself; presently I was telling the story of the Argonauts, with my inventions . . . Are you kin to that Simon Bridgeman who was the true founder of Nuber?"

"Simon was my uncle—sixteen years older than my father, who must be close to your age, sir. My father was only fourteen when Simon was assassinated, and Simon governed only a bit over two years—isn't that right?—before that happened."

"Yes, about two years. When I came here with Judd's party Simon Bridgeman had the new town already organized and was accepting refugees. Word got around, even in that confusion."

"I first heard your storytelling four years ago. It was at the corner of Broad and Dover Streets, and I was fifteen. That was a July afternoon too but very hot; we were all sweating up a stink and you had drawn a goodsized crowd. I was with my father and so not free to—not free." Angus' voice was warm, with the plangent overtones of adolescence, yet Demetrios wondered whether the boy might have tactfully steered him away from the subject of the Bridgeman clan—too important in the Inner City, rumor said, for Brian II and his party to risk conflict with them. "And that time too it was the story of the Argonauts. You held me enchanted. I *was* Jason."

"The Greeks might hardly recognize it."

"They won't criticize, from Olympus. Are you in a hurry to get home, Demetrios?"

"Ah, it's a pleasant place with a dear woman in it, and I'm tired. But I'd always have time for you, Angus Bridgeman."

"Thank you. As a favor, may I look at you closely? I'll explain. I am nearsighted. I can't see the shape of the moon, though people tell me it has one—well, no hurt there, I can design it to my own fancy. It was just my good fortune I heard your voice when I turned into Harrow Street or I might have gone by. So let me look at you clearly, yourself it is—do you mind?" His hands came to rest lightly on Demetrios' shoulders, one grasping Brand's leash with only the little finger hooked in the loop. Brand also stared with wild uncompromised alertness, he who could love or hate in a second's flash. Demetrios felt Angus' clean breath inches away and saw a broad forehead knitting in close regard, Angus' own face open to study if the old man cared to search.

It was a decisive face. Though unscratched by experience, nothing about it was amorphous or unfinished; the features were faultless, with a healthy flush under clear skin. All the Bridgemans had big straight noses and prominent jaws; in Angus the look of severity

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and heaviness was modified by a mouth that was sensitive and could surely be tender or humorous. His hands were admirable with latent strength; his dark red-brown hair fell heavy, shoulder- length, over the cream-white tunic. Demetrios could not remember seeing him before, with Steven Bridgeman. He must have been as beautiful at fifteen as he was now; perhaps that had been one of the days when Demetrios had felt sourly out of love with the crowd, barely willing to look at them and wishing them gone as soon as he had begun to speak—yet he had spoken well enough for Angus to remember it. Angus took his hands away. "Let's be friends."

"So be it, Angus."

By your story, you must have been here when my uncle was murdered. Year Three it was, twenty-five years before I was born."

"Year Three, yes. I wasn't in the market square when it happened. The whole community here that was looking to Simon Bridgeman for leadership—maybe a thousand of us all told, many more still drifting in—we were demoralized. There had been, you know, all the hopeful dreams that human beings nourish after they've survived one more ghastly blunder. We were going to learn from experience at last, build a new world in the light of reason and justice, and so on; then the leader we like and admire is butchered in the public market by three ruffians with knives, and we don't know what to do. We didn't know, certainly couldn't prove, who hired the assassins, or if anyone did. Acting on their own, said Brian, who had been just an obscure associate of Simon's, his lawyer in fact, before the war. They were fanatics with a grudge, said Brian."

"There was a crowd, wasn't there?"

"Yes, a little crowd had gathered in the market to hear Simon speak and explain a new system of taxes. The murder was expertly done, Angus. Before the people really knew what had happened the men were out at the fringes and then gone into the woods. But you must know all this."

"Not too well. It's ancient like a passage in the histories, like the martyrdom of Abraham that happened when I was two years old. Well, not quite. After all, my father was there in the market and saw the knives. Your account agrees with his. So nobody stopped them, they just ran away."

"Yes, Angus."

"And that first Brian, who invented the label 'King's Republic'—God, did he never look in a dictionary?—he too died before I was born. Died promising the restoration of the United States."

"He just might have used a dictionary. Brian I had some intelligence, anyway shrewdness. One of those power-drugged blow-hards who say openly to their contemporaries: "Look, you're all slobs and I'm another, so I'm going to get mine." Such fellows get credit for honesty and good nature though they seldom have a trace of either. The old tiresome thing of excusing your smell by declaring everybody

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stinks. It made a big part of the background for the 20th Century cult of despair."

"Brian II has lasted. Dictator of the King's Republic all my life." Angus said. (Like bat-wings at the edge of Demetrios' thought moved the words *Agent provocateur?* Demetrios dismissed them, for good: this boy would not betray; to think he might was itself a betrayal.)

"The wall between Inner and Outer Cities was raised before I was born, too. Till I was thirteen, everything beyond it was theory."

"Raised in Year Four, Angus. Brian I called it the reply of law and order to the wicked, wicked assassination of Simon Bridgeman."

"Aye-so? Building a wall against himself?"

"We don't actually know he hired the knife-men."

"Hm. The wall grows smaller. Demetrios, friend, for these last months, since my family has allowed me to stroll around in Outer City with no guard but Brand, I've been feeling—oh, like a chick fresh out of the shell . . . Can I talk to you like this? You don't seem frightened or—well, cautious, the way most people are with me in the Inner City. You're not currying favor, nor measuring out the words you think would be good for me."

"We're friends."

"So be it, Demetrios." They walked on slowly together, and Brand too was satisfied, following at the side as he was trained to do, with respect for human legs. "My uncle had no private police?"

"I think that's true. Simon Bridgeman, I recall, acted like a man who thought he was in no physical danger from those around him. Brian I—call him medieval, or maybe timeless; Machiavelli would have understood him. But your uncle Simon Bridgeman was very much a 20th Century man, Angus. A business man before the collapse, which meant he knew all about making enemies, fighting with the dirty weapons of money and influence but never worrying about a knife in the gut, because that very seldom happened to 20th Century merchant princes unless they went into politics. A 20th Century rich man, and somewhat cultured too. He saw the disaster coming and persuaded his rich neighbors—some of them were real stinkers, by the way—to join forces with him in creating an enclave for survival. They dug into their mountain and renamed it Mount Everlasting—a poor choice I would say, for isn't it only natural that the hills should wear down and pass away like the rest of us?"

"Why was it Nuber you came to, back in Year One?"

"Judd Wilmot followed a rumor we heard after—after Aberedo. We heard a community here was successful, and accepting newcomers. The name confused us, because we'd also heard that Newburgh and other Hudson River towns had been demolished in the floods, especially one that followed a great earthquake somewhere north of Albany. We had seen for ourselves what the rains were doing—flooded highways, washed-out bridges, acres of muddy water seething—that's one reason why it took us from July into September just to go from Missouri

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to Pennsylvania. One day after Aberedo we met a little group like ourselves, only they happened to believe that everything had to be better in the *west!* Dear old Judd was remarkably angry with them, and they with us. Long live difference of opinion and its cracking of skulls!—well, our quarrel with them wasn't all that fierce. They told us how the Mohawk and the Hudson had overwhelmed the banks from the Finger Lakes to the sea. What Lake Ontario was doing nobody knew. They explained that Nuber was a town fresh-built around the nucleus of some Old-Time village and a fantastic underground shelter, several miles inland from the Old-Time city of Newburgh. Fresh-built by lunatics, they said, for God was about to destroy the entire northeastern United States. Wall Street was somehow involved in Jehovah's disturbed emotional condition." Angus smiled, not quite understanding. "The same prophecy had been made during the return of Halley's comet in 1986—I was six years old then, if you can imagine it."

"My father remembers the rains. He looks older than you."

"Something about storytelling keeps me youngish. Back in those ugly days others got wind of Nuber. We arrived here as part of a crowd converging from several directions. Your uncle dealt with us and found room for most, being stern only with the ones who weren't willing to work for the new city. With my hands, Angus, I helped to build Simon Bridgeman's tower on the summit of Mount Everlasting, and later, under the monarchy—excuse me, the King's Republic—I laid some of the stones that walled in (and protected) your childhood."

"And now you're helping me across the wall. Did you know that, Demetrios?"

"It's a function of old people, occasionally. Sometimes their best reason for staying alive, though we do have others."

"I don't think of you as old."

"Old enough . . . Well, your very intelligent uncle Simon Bridgeman probably knew the influx of refugees from chaos would soon stop—no wide communications any more, no large population left. Brian Gorman—who took the name Brian I after the assassination—why, he seemed a nobody while Simon lived, a dry man, nothing remarkable about him but a heavy voice that told crass jokes, piffling echoes of remarks that had been salty and original when first delivered by Abraham Lincoln or W. C. Fields."

"What does it ever mean, calling someone a great man?"

"Maybe a great man is one who can stay out of tune with his times and nevertheless make himself heard—for good or evil: there can be evil great men as well as good ones; history offers full pictures of many of them and has buried others in the compost of the footnotes."

"My head's running over with too much, Demetrios. I've begun to detest the artificial aristocracy I belong to. It's without basis—isn't it? Soon I suppose they'll be calling us a nobility, with more flummery, pretense, arse-kissing."

"The centuries-old patterns

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shape up again."

"But meaningless, meaningless."

"Meanings unclear. You crave a meaning for life, Angus?"

"I've read the books—I know what America was, and might have been—yes, yes I do. How can anyone not want it?"

"We have to make our own meanings, not find them." The boy stared at him. "Evil-directed souls—the power-hungry, the cruel, the greedy and stupid—they have to make their own meanings too: even if they imagine that God or the Leader has provided them ready-made, there is still the act of consent, of agreement. And Utopias fall flat because they depend on the false notion that every person would want the imaginary good state if only he understood it—the hell he would: he wants his own dream-country, maybe one that includes slavery, and whips."

Am I giving him too much, too fast? The life of Angus in the Inner City, Demetrios reflected, must be like that of one caught in the quiet of the eye of a hurricane. Around him swirled the power politics of a little world still in a state of shock, old rules and new tangled together, nostalgia for an age of science still aching in a culture of ox-team, spade, bow and arrow. Demetrios had caught glimpses of Brian II on the King's rare pseudo-democratic appearances in Outer City and had been reminded of a much photographed Italian dictator of the middle 20th Century whose corpse, when the tide turned against him, had been strung up to a lamp-post beside that of his mistress—almost a hundred years ago, yet here and there no doubt photographs still existed of that appropriate medieval obscenity. It has often been embarrassingly difficult to know what century one is inhabiting at any given time.

"Make our own meaning . . . Demetrios, I ought not to keep you from home, but would you come to the Meadows a while? That's a fairly good tavern at the edge of the park—might I buy you a couple of drinks? They keep me filthy with more money than I can spend, even on women—I don't like buying sex anyhow. We could talk some more—sit out on the grass by Paddy's Place where nobody would eavesdrop."

"Demetrios never turned down a drink with a friend. I know Paddy well, and I've done my storytelling sometimes at the thing they call a temple, near there. Paddy would have been a highwayman in Old Time, or a used-car salesman."

THEY followed Harrow Street's climb into the parkland encircling the wall that Demetrios when young had helped to build. On the other side of the wall rose Inner City's terraces and graystone buildings to the rounded broad summit of Mount Everlasting. Good drinks they were, in the low long tavern said to date from Old Time, and in Paddy's frog-face as he served them was a polite but obvious wonder, what old Demetrios would be up to with a white-clad Bridgeman. But Paddy was a genteel pirate whose single joke was to say that he avoided the common cold by keeping his snout out of other people's business. No crowd infested Paddy's

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lawn. Angus and Demetrios could nibble their cheese and drink the two-year-old Katskil wine in comfort, watching a slow-growing storm pattern enlarge over the hills. The park known as the Meadows was high enough to provide a glimpse, through a break in the mountains, of the waters of the Hudson Sea.

"Does your vision give you the meeting of sea and sky?"

"Without certainty, Demetrios. Light speaks to me."

Not far away, on a more tramped and weedy part of the Meadows, stood the Temple, which might have been well enough named had any god dwelt there—the wistful invitation of a name will not fetch them by itself any more. It was a wooden block of roof about fifty feet by twenty, on pillars of stone—(people in Katskil have been heard to argue that the great earthquake north of Albany never happened)—and its erection had been endowed by an Inner City philanthropist about ten years ago. He felt the People ought to have an agreeable meeting-place for like folk-dancing; he wanted it called the Mall, and it was to be like the Parthenon only some bigger, but when the money ran out he allowed it could be some smaller so long as it was rectangular. Which it was, but on the entablature there marched no frieze of splendor and strife—just shingles, which look neater and call for maybe less upkeep. In the 20th Century he could have hired experts to go to Athens and come up with a genuine replica, in Permaglit and wired for sound: to every country its own idiom.

Two groups had gathered at opposite ends of the shelter, one a flock of mostly young people, in solid-color tunic and skirt and loincloth — breathing flower-petals clustered around a center, which was a bearded goor in a red robe. The other group was of mixed ages and restless, crying amens, preached to by a harsh-voiced man in a gray loincloth. He had tossed his tunic aside. Repeatedly he placed his left hand on his ridgy ribs in the neighborhood of the heart, with thumb and forefinger circled, the other three fingers lifted, and his right hand spread out over the liver, more or less, indicating the carnal self—the sign of the Wheel and the Flesh. This was more and more commonly seen in Nuber, as the cult of Abraham grew. Some difficult people among the Abrahamites declared that the right hand ought to be curved over the genitals instead of the liver—makings of a possible religious war. The confused noise, as the two distant groups rather bitterly ignored each other in a spirit of love and forgiveness, reached Demetrios as mutter and squeak. Neither speaker was very good, the Abrahamite too hoarse, the goor too mellow.

"Local Agora," said Angus.

"Ayah, but I believe Socrates was detained."

"I almost met that goor in the red wrap-around, anyhow I think it's Goor Johnson. I can't make out his face but there couldn't be two that fat, both in red monkeries. Senator Smith invited him to Inner City not long ago, a garden party, though I don't think the Senator's turned believer. Goor Johnson holds that the human spirit can't put off

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the shackles of the flesh and become one with the Unique Infinite unless it rejects the perverted doctrine of a spherical planet."

"Is there a non-unique Infinite?"

"Shit, man, can't recall if he said. Anyhow the thing's flat, okay? If we'd admit it we could ass-end to heaven right off, no sweat. See, it's only sheer love for humankind that keeps the goor earth-bound—overweight has nothing to do with it. He made it sound very attractive, but I was pervertedly munching maple and walnut cookies, and by the time I had them finished some other simple soul was crimping his transcendental ear, so I hitched up my shackled spirit and split."

"Well, you're not ripe for heaven. The other noisemaker is Holman Shawn, a preacher for the Society of Disciples, sometimes called Abrahamites, or Brownists."

"I suppose I should know more about them. Demetrios, has the proportion of freaks always been as high as it is in Nuber?"

"Why, I think so. I dare say the proportions have always stayed about the same, maybe from ancient times—a handful of the very bright, a handful of subnormal and idiots, a multitude of the in-between, and everywhere a sprinkling of unpredictable weirdies like pepper in the stew." Demetrios brooded, bedeviled by a familiar distress. During the first years of his street-corner activity he had occasionally told the story of the martyrdom of Abraham Brown, as his own sickened eyes had witnessed it—but not quite honestly. He had glossed over some of the savagery, the incorrigible human darkness, and might have made the poor brave fanatic Abraham appear more than life-size. Well, in a way it was, but so are all the thinking few. Crackpot or no, Abraham Brown did live with purity of motive and courage in action, and he did die for what he was, in the manner of Christ. Had Demetrios' tellings of the tale played a part in launching one more miserable messianic cult, which would infallibly pervert anything good in the man's teaching and blow up all of it into whatever monstrous creation suited the fancies and the politics of the church-makers? "Dear Angus," he said, "I wonder sometimes whether a life of quietism, or at least one of deliberate simplicity and very limited action, may not be the only one that does no serious harm. Even poor Goor Johnson may have a glimmering of that, if he isn't just in it for the money and cookies."

"The world stinks," said Angus. The boy's shift of mood caught Demetrios unprepared, as if Angus had tumbled into despair like one slipping off a narrow mountain trail. "It *stinks.* Not the world of course. Man. The dirty hairy animal—but damn it, he isn't, always. He doesn't *have* to be—or does he? Cruelty, meanness, greed, sicknesses of mind and body, suspicion—Demetrios, I know a little about you. It's almost a fact that I came looking for you—no, I'd better say, I've watched for you, hoped to see you again ever since I first heard you, four years ago. I trust you, Demetrios. Do you know there's a stupid faction in Inner City that want to make a politician of me?

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See themselves as king-makers. Power stinks. O Demetrios, what am I to do? What is my work? The world doesn't want people like me."

"The world isn't capable of wanting. It just blunders on. I know—by 'world' you meant 'people at large'. Same answer. You will find your own art, Angus."

"How, in my ignorance? *How?*"

"I'd tell you if I could. Art of guidance? Leadership—teaching? I can tell you at least that things are unimportant. Love is never a thing, it's a country where we can make journeys."

"Demetrios, did you see Abraham die?"

"Yes. I can't believe martyrdom ever serves. It moves us but it doesn't teach. Our response to martyrdom is a self-indulgence. We remember the hemlock and the cross, but what have we ever done with the wisdom of Socrates or the compassion of Jesus?"

"Will you tell me the story of Abraham, though?"

"Yes. I must think about it. I'm tired now and disturbed."

"Forgive me, I've kept you from going home. Will you meet me here again? Tomorrow, near to noontime?"

"Tomorrow, near noon. Peace."

"Peace, Demetrios."

IV

Solitaire was Waiting

I never know the time on a day when I make a friend.
—DEMETRIOS.

DEMETRIOS strode slowly down from the park toward that section of Outer City's fringe where Redcurtain Street occupies a slice of the arc, and perplexity traveled with him like a cloud of gnats. He was not what he had been before meeting Angus. In their talk neither had mentioned that policeman, but in Demetrios' loneliness the fellow loomed large. Angus, who would have grown up to regard an Outer City policeman as one more underling, probably thought the incident a trifle. Demetrios himself had simply forgotten Joe Park in the charm of Angus' presence. Past time had been clear before this hour just gone; now the present filled the horizon; yet Demetrios was not even certain that he loved the boy.

Angus belonged to modern society as old Demetrios of the 20th Century could not. *Three hours ago I did not know him. Faith moves no mountains except in the mind of the pious daydreamer; love is stronger, not compelled like faith to feed on illusion—it may do so, true, and thus poison itself, but it need not.*

He turned into a dismal alley, a short cut to Redcurtain Street. The houses here had been slung together of scrap lumber in the year before Simon Bridgeman's assassination, when refugees had begun to be less welcome in the city-state of Nuber; they stooped crazily toward each other like gossiping hags. Simon Bridgeman, son of the plastic age, never achieved a reliable sawmill. That was left for Brian I, who also understood the bow and arrow, pike, and tomahawk. Now-

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adays we harness the streams flowing into the Hudson Sea and the enormous Delaware, and there's a quarry beyond Mount Orlook where they cut good millstones. In this alley Demetrios looked sharp for foraging hogs, scattered filth, pariah dogs vicious as weasels, and drunks. Not much violent crime plagued Nuber in the Year 47; what there was lurked spider-like in crannies like this one.

He walked along briskly, swinging his walnut stick, keeping it visible in the late shadowed daylight. Sometimes the old man entered such places unnecessarily, recognizing the foolishness of it. One challenges the black spider to jump, and afterward feels—no, not younger, but perhaps more alive.

—People still dwell in the wilderness regions beyond Katskil and other centers, exceedingly wild but hardly demonic as folk imagine. They live there from choice. They could abandon their feral ways and accept the shelter of the city-states—Katskil, Moha, Penn. But they don't. Now I am gone again.—

Demetrios emerged safe from his alley onto Redcurtain Street, where the police permit nothing unpleasant. High powers of Inner City have always favored it, and own shares of course; white-tunic people enjoy the clean sidewalks at proper hours. Local custom requires the burial of garbage in the gardens behind the houses, so pigs and pi-dogs are not drawn to scavenge. Demetrios took pride in the flowers and vegetables he raised for Mam Estelle's establishment, although this came under Janitor Work only by liberal definition. Many houses on Redcurtain Street own bay windows and balconies where the girls sit on view, sharing these cosy promontories with sleeping cats. A charming street, at least in the Year 47.

On the front steps of Mam Estelle's, the Professor was musing alone with his lute when Demetrios reached home. He lifted a brown finger in greeting, missing never a note of the scale passage that flittered up and out of the heart's view like a climbing bluebird. "It's been a good day," said Demetrios.

The Professor nodded, spilling from the lute more diamond-dust of sound. Normally one asked him only yes-or-no questions, since he was a mute. "A good warm day. I made a new friend, and maybe I'm happy." A glowing arpeggio acknowledged the possibility of happiness. The Professor's eyes were unfathomably soft, with gold lights. His skin was tan, his hair short and curly. Demetrios assumed his origins were partly black, but like many in the city-state of Nuber he admitted no past. They had been friends for years. Often the Professor, when the Mam did not need him in the Parlor, went forth into the city with Demetrios; his presence and his lute might lead the streetcorner tales into fresh dimensions. This, and the sharing of Solitaire's bed, created bonds of kindness.

"The girls must be getting up by now." The Professor nodded, watching music fly away. He seldom smiled unless a south wind was blowing; today the wind was in the east. Momentarily Demetrios

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observed something of Garth in the Professor's luxuriant mouth, the tilt of his head, something of Solitaire in the long grace of his hands—not strange that those we love should share traits of appearance. "I never know the time on a day when I make a friend." The Professor found Time worth a respectful shrug. "Be with you again soon, paesan." In 47 this descendant of an Italian word had joined the other endearments of English, that Mississippi of languages. Demetrios squeezed the Professor's shoulder and entered Mam Estelle's sex-house.

The Mam was enjoying tea in the company of pretty Glorie and sallow Fran, casually using a squat pink tea set known to be genuine Woolworth, and lacing her own tea as if absent mindedly with fire from a jug of corn whiskey. As Babette crossly told her, had told her thirty times, she must have drunk enough Penn tea to float the Katskil navy—four cat-boats and a ketch. It was that time of afternoon when a protective haze so sheltered Mam Estelle that she let the house run itself, which meant that Babette ran it. "Mam, I declare to you, yourself it is, I got me this extra bicep just from lifting the durn kettle to the taypot for to make you tea and tea and tea." It wasn't the tea that worried goodhearted Babette.

"Take off thir'y pounds," said Mam Estelle gently, "and maybe your arm'll be thin enough I can see the bicep." Blonde Glorie giggled. Fran's lips moved, likely checking some passage from the Book of Positions. Fran was a gentle, serious girl; to bed her was like earning academic credits.

Rugged Babette, maid-of-all-work here for the last ten years, usually got the worst of any argument. She greeted Demetrios with easy affection—they balled occasionally—and said: "She's through work, man Demetrios. Upstairs." Estelle sighed, busy perhaps in the corn-spirit haze with work-hours and the whole rusty, leaky affair of living.

A year ago Demetrios had found Solitaire wandering in the woods outside of town. She had been gang-raped, she said, and then had hidden and starved a few days. She could not remember who she was. He had brought her to the refuge of Mam Estelle's, as a special case. She could help mind the house, sharing room and bed only with him and the Professor. She was not to be touched by the customers, otherwise all three would split. "Needn't blackmail an old friend," said the Mam—"I'll love her myself."

Estelle relied on him. Who else would mind the fires and tend the garden for so small a wage, and entertain with stories in the Parlor apparently for the love of it? Where would she find the equal of the Professor, whose lute could give you the sound of children laughing or of breaking hearts? Mam Estelle had never been a pig for money, nor unkind. Soon she did feel and show a tenderness of her own for Solitaire—who even now remembered no identity for herself. Probably the girl's eccentric grace was being memorialized in the fat locked book, the Diary, which Demetrios recognized as a vital though slow-

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rhythmed heart at the core of Mam Estelle's existence. Mam Estelle was shyly proud of her Old-Time knack of reading and writing. No one else ever beheld the Diary: she had less vanity than most authors, and a better means of earning a living.

Solitaire was thin and sweet and small, and in a thin small sweet way she was quite mad.

DEMETRIOS climbed the stairs and passed down the long upper hall, returning the lazy greetings of the girls who were getting ready for supper and a night's work, and reached the large pleasant room at the rear of the house that he shared with the Professor and Solitaire. From this room one could look down on the garden and rejoice in its superiority to anything the neighbors had; also keep track of their affairs if so minded—sometimes he told Solitaire fly-away stories about them off the top of his head. She was sitting slumped on the big bed, dressed as he had expected in the slattern rags and stains of the day's work, her hair in a tight bun under a dust-cloth, her cheeks smeared. The sag of dejection and premature age—that also was worn like a garment. It was horrifying to see her so, but Demetrios knew the compensations for this masquerade, this protective show that enabled her to go mouse-like, unnoticed, about her labors. Sometimes she drew attention anyway, merely by a slimness and grace impossible to hide, but she was convincingly a drab slavey.

At this moment she was lost in gazing at that planet which endures and continues beyond all our windows. She turned her dark head slowly as Demetrios closed the door behind him, and in her brown eyes—droop-lidded they would have been during the day, night-fires hidden—her recognition bloomed: a bright fish blazes out of the murk of a pool in suddenness and gold.

"Solitaire was waiting for Demetrios." He had never known her to employ that upright pronoun against whose pillar-like rigidity most of us lean all day long and half the night; nor did she liberate the short thick blade of the other prodigious member of speech that rhymes with *who*. In the shelter of the third person Solitaire dwelt for her own reasons, and there she could be found if you loved her as Demetrios and the Professor loved her. "Solitaire has five hearts." She held up spread fingers. "One to keep, and one the dogs ate, and one for Jesus, and one for Professor, and one for Demetrios." But it would not be one of her bad nights.

"All mine. And it's been a good day," said Demetrios again. "Good and bad. I made a friend; but on the dark side, a policeman has told me I must get a license for story-telling."

"License? Phoo-ha!" She did not laugh; she was quick to see the possibilities of ugliness. Solitaire feared the dark, always wanting a low lamp or bit of candle burning even when she lay snug in bed between Demetrios and the Professor. She remarked once that living was walking in the jungle, but sometimes there were friends. "Aye-so, and what will it cost, man Demetrios?"

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"The cop wouldn't tell me, though I think he knew." Demetrios sank into the luxury of his armchair. Solitaire smiled. A certain ritual could not start till he was there, finished with the part of the day that took him from her. She never liked his going forth and squandering his stories on the crowds for their trifling money when he might have stayed safe at home. Once on a rainy day he had found her at a window blessing the clouds. But she never told Demetrios (or anyone) what to do. "I'll go to the Town Hall tomorrow and find out."

She made a silver yawny sound. A shake of her head dismissed the Town Hall and the whole blot of nonsense where tomorrow could scrabble after it. She pulled the dustcloth from her head and tossed it on the floor. She was bringing a light table and chair to the middle of the room when the Professor came in, and she smiled at him too.

The Professor pushed the door-bolt shut and sat cross-legged on the floor by Demetrios' armchair. His lute spoke as a part of his limber little body, soft-mannered and amorous.

Solitaire fetched her tinder-box—(let no one else ever use or touch it, or she would rage and weep)—and lit the candles in their sconces, placing them one at each end of the table. Then she brought, from a chest by the bed, a strip of red cloth, a pair of shears, a wash-cloth, a cake of soap, a basin, a hand-mirror. The basin she filled with water from the bedside pitcher.

Solitaire washed her face.

There must be a hundred ways of doing this—snorty-splash, flip - and - finish, grunt-and-slop, scrub-and-search, pinch-and-suffer Solitaire just took the wet cloth and the delicate soap—(for which Demetrios and the Professor paid high at a shop catering mostly to the white-tunic trade; but cost was barely comprehensible to Solitaire although she might dutifully ask about it; addition was a mystery, subtraction unknown, and money something that other people usually had)—and removed the dirt from face and hands. Most of it she had put there herself, part of the disguise. Though she worked hard and honestly for Mam Estelle she practised physical caution, mindful of her skin because her lovers desired it; and for its own sake too?—who knows? The Mam tried to limit her to such chores as bedmaking, sweeping, dusting, that would not expose her to soot and grease and stains, and Babette was usually on hand, ready to intervene with noisy competence if Solitaire needed help; for which reason Solitaire almost never wept or raged in their presence.

The hand-mirror was two-sided, an artifact of Old Time, and faultless; one side magnified, by a magic wholly marvelous to Solitaire. She loved the gidget because the Professor had found it for her, he could not say where. She brushed her black hair, crackle and spark and gleam, with another Old-Time treasure, a brush of true plastic, airy in design and flimsy-light. They are saying, Old Time will not come again.

She might have been alone,

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readying herself for an evening's entertainment or just observing her beauty as if one could do this with detachment. She loosened the slavey's smock to her hips and stroked each breast—round, bud-immature, warmly shadowed around the nipple—lifting it to the shine of the candles.

She cut a diamond-shaped segment from the red cloth, examining it tenderly as if it might be a creature of life, then slapped it down on the table and pierced it with a brutal thrust of the shears, so that the metal stood upright in the wood. Eyes squinted in pain, she spread her hands, letting them say: *That's how it was—if you care how it was.* Then quietly, a good housewife, moving about in nothing but her coarse linsey drawers, she rolled the table back to the side of the room, the shears yet standing. (Some time during the night—one of her good nights—she would slip out of bed alone and finish tidying up, putting away the shears, dropping the pierced cloth in the wastebasket.) She opened the clothes closet, hanging up her drawers and contemplating her wardrobe.

The Professor's lute remained silent until she chose from less than a dozen costumes a long belted robe of dull red with yellow trim and fine bone buttons of creamy white. Demetrios and the Professor had pooled the earnings of more than a month to buy that for her. Of the other costumes only one was street wear, a suit of loose trousers and jacket, leaf-brown, that made her look, but for her way of walking, very like a boy. The lute exulted. One of her good nights, and time for love before supper.

She stood naked so that her lovers might know her with their eyes, her left arm underlining her breasts, her right hand out to warn that the time was not quite yet. Demetrios looked on the slender stem of legs widening to the amphora of hips, torso, midnight triangle, and to that sudden bloom of rose and darkness at the summit, her wise sad face. Reason dwelt there with her madness, and both were Solitaire.

The storm breeze was pushing at the open window. A motion of the Professor's hand offered to close it, but Solitaire shook her head. She slipped on the robe leaving it open, warm flesh shining. She said to Demetrios: "Solitaire is here."

HE LIFTED her to the bed, and took her with the slowness and gentleness that were necessary. Over the house and the troubled city, beyond the homely jubilant toil of his body, he heard the desired rushing of wind and rain.

It was for Solitaire to choose which of her lovers would enter her, and when. For her the storm was so intense and shattering—certain revolting shadows gathering like wild dogs at the edge of a forest—that she could not bear it often. Demetrios thought of his body as a protecting frame for the central blaze. The Professor's lute murmured in tenderness and reassurance. Now and then during the long course of Demetrios' love, Solitaire reached out to touch the Professor's left arm, for when she did that (she said once) some of the force that guided his music through the

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strings flowed into her too and changed trouble to a singing.

She cried out in the extremity of the pleasure-agony, and lay at peace. In a while she said—for like the child that she was not, Solitaire loved a story all the more with frequent telling, and would be disturbed if changes occurred even in the small words: "Demetrios will tell the Professor and Solitaire the story of Anya the Goose Girl."

V

She was Good as Gold

Some geese will believe anything. —*DEMETRIOS.*

"ANYA WAS a princess of Peranelios long ago, when magicians outranked even kings. Kings might lay taxes and order heads chopped off, but magicians could make people (including kings) vanish in an instant. Involuntary vanishing was felt to be unpleasant, although when the thing was done right the subject never came back to describe it: the Peraneliotic opinion was that we'd just rather *not* disappear zzzp! like that, leaving a small gray or dirty-lavender vacuum which fizzed slightly and then itself disappeared—phsssp! LIKE THAT. Once in a great while a disappeared person did straggle back to Peranelios with some unacceptable tale of returning to consciousness in China or Brooklyn—(we know there aren't any such places)—and thumbing rides home. If these characters got tiresome about their problems, a magician was usually sent for to redisappear them.

"Magicians most often performed this trick—teleportation isn't quite the word—if they were asked some stupid question when they were trying to meditate.

"Anya was a good princess. As a little girl she never talked back, remembered to wash her hands, always pushed something better than the pope's nose to the edge of her golden plate for the deserving poor. She worked at being good. She studied her lessons, was kind to dolls and pets and servants, found out where babies come from by asking the cook instead of bothering Mama, and when the King was having a tantrum she said nothing but 'Yes, Daddy,' and 'No, Daddy,' and 'Maybe, Daddy.' She was good as gold. Everyone thought what a glorious queen she would make, but she had three elder brothers, all healthy, so that was out: nothing to do but marry her off to somebody well-connected and not too wormy.

"As she grew from a little girl to an eligible princess, one thing troubled her. She liked being loved and admired—that's human—and one luminary at the court just wouldn't do it, the Dean of Magicians. He had a long cynical nose and was named Mennoc Moses, and by the way, nobody disappeared by Mennoc Moses ever came back. It preyed on Anya's mind. She thought of charming the old brute, but this would not have been sincere. You can't execute that kind of magician except by catching him asleep, which her father wouldn't consider; she couldn't do it herself because she was good. It preyed on her mind, right up to the day when the King told her he had

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arranged a luscious marriage for her with the Prince of Pommes de Terre. 'But, Daddy—'

"'I see you mean to give me an argument,' said King Dagobert. (The current Prince of Pommes de Terre had massive gold and ivory teeth in the front of his face but none of his own; he was seventy-two, kept twelve concubines in stitches, and bet on the horses.)

"'You know I never do that, Daddy,' said Princess Anya.

"'That's right.' King Dagobert leered. 'You don't, do you?'

"Sadly she left him planning his takeover of Pommes de Terre, which has rich deposits of bezoar stone, and went straight to Mennoc Moses. 'My Daddy says I have to marry the Prince of Pommes de Terre.'

"'Do you know,' said the Dean of Magicians, 'that you interrupted my calculation of the orbit of the comet Bolowje?'

"'I'm sorry. My Daddy says I have to marry him.'

"'Who, Bolowje? He died in 1846."

"'Pommes de Terre."

"'Oh, him. I wish you'd stop pestering. And you don't want to?'

"'I'm in love with the cobbler's boy.'

"'So go marry him.'

"'My Daddy says I have to marry the Prince of Pommes de Terre.'

"'Oh, *go* away!' As he spoke, the Dean of Magicians made an occult motion, inadvertent we feel sure, which sent Princess Anya whirling thousands of miles—zzzp! like that—and a thousand more, while Mennoc Moses scratched his shiny skull, watching a small lavender vacuum on the floor fizz out—phssp! like that. What he had *meant* to say was 'Vanish, O Prince of Whatever-it-was!' He sighed, allowed himself one quick alembic, and went back to work.

"PRINCESS Anya landed in Peraselene — (*other* side of China)—and the people of Peranelios lamented the loss of their dear princess, but not even King Dagobert felt up to tackling Mennoc Moses when he was busy. He was always busy. Dagobert rustled up a more marginal type princess for the Prince of Pommes de Terre, hoping it would blow over.

"And Anya? Well, she came down phlump in a grassy field in that country of Peraselene where everything is upside down only not very much, and the field had a lovely border of summer woods, and a charming pond full of white, brown, and brindle geese, who whopped out of the water, gathered around Princess Anya, and hissed. 'Stop hissing,' said Anya, 'or I'll tell your goose girl.'

"'We don't have a goose girl,' said the Boss Gander. 'The last one quit. Couldn't stand the farmer's wife. Nor the farmer.'

"'Then I'm your goose girl until we can make official arrangements, and I tell you to stop hissing. I take full responsibility, because I happen to be a princess by trade.'

"'Is it all right if we graze?' asked the Boss Gander.

"'Quite all right,' said Anya. 'Graze at will.'

"They were cheerfully grazing when the farmer's wife came to investigate. I forgot to say that the

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geese had honked as well as hissed, and that the good Princess Anya was wearing a fancy dirndl of cloth of gold or something, plus an attractive wrap-around coronet which the Prime Minister had given her that very morning, for being good. But the farm wife was nearsighted as well as senile, and had forgotten her goose girl had quit. 'Where'd you steal the funny clothes?' she asked. 'Why can't you keep those beasts under control? Who do you think you are anyway?'

"'This costume would occasion no adverse comment at my original residence,' said Princess Anya. 'The geese are quite well-behaved, asking only to be understood. In answer to your third question, I am Princess Anya of Peranelios, but I am prepared to act as your temporary goose-girl, for the experience plus maintenance, until more appropriate arrangements can be activated. I expect to be in communication with Peranelios within a limited space of time.'

"'What you are,' said the farmer's wife, 'is out of your head.' And she warmed the back of the good princess with a willow switch. She was a woman not much open to reason, and Princess Anya, after she was done crying, could think of nothing to do except be good.

"'So it went on for some time, as they measure time in Paraselene, where the clocks are out of order as a result of being upside down but not very much. Anya had to rise before dawn, breakfast lightly on a crust of dry bread with butter on it, a tumbler of milk, and a pork chop, and go take care of her geese. That meant keeping off foxes and wolves, seeing that the goslings never got chilled, plucking the down—have you ever tried plucking a live goose? I haven't either—fighting off the farmer's boy who kept saying and saying he wanted to marry her, and generally making herself useful. In winter evenings when the geese were penned up she had to read to the farmer out of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, or Proust. He had begun both books when he was young; now that his eyes were failing he still hoped to finish at least one. It was a hard, grim life for little Anya, and often she felt the only friend she had was the Boss Gander, who loved to sit in the sun with her and hear tales of court life at Peranelios. Some geese will believe anything."

"WELL, go on!" said Solitaire.

"Sure. Don't I always wait to be nudged at that point? Besides, I thought you were asleep. So we shall return to the court of Peranelios, where everything was getting sticky. The youngest of Anya's brothers had died of measles, the second in age had turned priest, renouncing the throne in three languages, and what does the eldest son goodly Prince Cuthbert do but waddle off in full armor against the Visigoths, which was not only unprofitable but more dangerous than skiing and gave the cobbler's boy ideas.

"He was a nice kid—name was Hans. Princess Anya had met him only once, when she took her glass slippers to be half-soled, and they had sworn eternal devotion in some haste because she had to hurry off and dedicate a foundation. He was

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about to bring back the slippers—beautiful job too—on the day she was disappeared. He swore implacable vengeance upon Mennoc Moses and then looked around for something more practical, but some years passed before the eldest son went to war and gave him at least the germ of an idea. He transmitted an offer to King Dagobert (through channels) to go find Princess Anya and secure the succession, in return for the usual consideration—half of the kingdom, and the princess. Dagobert turned him down flat.

"Word came fairly soon, however, that the Visigoths had (predictably) done in our national hero Prince Cuthbert—were in fact only a few miles from the gates of Peranelios. Dagobert reconsidered. Since Mennoc Moses was busy, he summoned Hans the Cobbler's Boy, apologized magnanimously for his hasty decision, and inquired if the offer was still open. 'It is, your ineffable Majesty,' said Hans, 'except I have to make it sixty-forty now—inflation.'"

"'Fifty-five forty-five?"

"'Sixty-forty.'

"'All *right* already. Some of my blood too? Convoy of pikemen and elephants? Travelers' cheques?'

"'No, your supernal Majesty,' said Hans, who rather fancied himself as a Galahad type, only practical. 'No, I mean to go alone, and simply. It will attract less attention. And—' here he really stuck his neck out—'and if I fail in my mission, do with me whatever you will.'

"Dagobert reflected that after all, nobody disappeared by Mennoc Moses ever had turned up. There was nothing to be done except get ready to make a deal with the Visigoths; there never is. But he was a man who liked to hedge his bets when he could. 'Done,' said Dagobert, and he leered.

"Hans backed out of the Presence, and (as a part of his implacable vengeance) he hurried to Mennoc Moses with a proposition: ten per cent of his sixty per cent if Mennoc would just kindly undisappear the Princess right now. He knew—smart boy—that vanished princesses in fairy-tales always reappear. But Mennoc Moses hooted at him. "I could make the entire kingdom vanish if I was a-mind to, I should settle for ten per cent of sixty per cent? Forget it. Besides, I never undisappear anybody—a matter of principle.' (The truth is he didn't know how.) 'But I'll tell you how to find her, free for nothing, which is what it's worth.'

"How, O fount of Supramundane wisdom, if a Cobbler's Boy may so express himself?"

"'Why, thank you, son. Oh, you ravel east, west, north, and south at more or less the same time; then take a left, and a right, and go straight on for Peraselene—you can't miss it. Must be back on the job now. Nice meeting you.'

"Hans the Cobbler's Boy traveled off east, west, north, and south at more or less the same time, and took a left and a right, and didn't notice anything that looked like Peraselene, so he asked a redbird: 'Is this the way to Peraselene, your Eminence?' 'He's busy,' said the redbird—'I'm Mrs. Eminence. Well, you should have turned right back along there, but if you take a

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left by the schoolhouse you can't miss it.' And poor Hans had a number of similar experiences, until at length he encountered an Alien who didn't tell him he couldn't miss it—just told him where it was. All of which took time, time.

"Meanwhile back in Peranelios King Dagobert had what may have been the first bright thought of his long and glorious reign. He asked Mennoc Moses (politely, when he wasn't too busy) to disappear the Visigoths. Which the old man did, with nothing worse than an irritated grumble—would have taken care of it sooner if he'd known that was what Dag wanted, and was there anything else on his mind?

"'Oh Lord no!' says King Dagobert, quitting while he was ahead. 'No, everything's fabulous. Have a good day.'

"AND Hans, following the Alien's instructions, came at last to the charming cottage of Anya the Goose Girl, whom he recognized at once although she had grown up considerably. The Farmer's Wife had died of her own ill-nature, but the Farmer still had hopes of getting through Gibbon, and Anya the Goose Girl was reading him page 2004 of Proust at the very moment Hans knocked on her door. She had less time for the reading now, with the housework and everything, but the Farmer was patient, and still wanted to study the structure of each sentence. If dear Anya was a bit slow to recognize the Cobbler's Boy it was because her mind had to be on a lot of things; but then she recalled that he was connected with trade, and remembered more and more, and asked him: 'Did you bring the slippers?'

"'No, sorry, I forgot. But O my Beloved, half of my soul, I have come to take you back to Peranelios, and for this your noble father will give me half of his kingdom, or rather sixty per cent.'

"'But I can't, possibly—darling, give it back to Joe, it was his to begin with, you know that—sorry, I was talking to my youngest, he's going through a Phase—'

"'It's all right,' said the Farmer's Boy—'I got the little stinkers separated.' He had turned out well, by the way—I mean the Farmer's Boy—and tried hard to be a good husband.

"'Of course,' said Anya the Goose Girl, 'it was awfully nice of you to think of it, only you can see how it is.'

"'Happy to have you stay for dinner,' said the Farmer's Boy. 'Maybe go a mite slow on the O-my-Beloved bit, account we're sort of square around the edges, meaning no offense.'

"'And the felicity occasioned by his attendance at the prandial board,' said the Farmer, 'would present no less an example of reciprocally desiderated enjoyment than a leisured appraisal of the summation he might elect to offer of his peregrinations—'

"'He goes on like that,' said Anya. 'Stay for dinner of course—Hans.' She did remember his name.

"So Hans stayed for dinner, and petted the children who were still of leg-climbing age, admired the squashes and petunias, and was in-

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troduced to the Boss Gander, who bit him, and headed back to Peranelios as soon as possible . . . Are you asleep?"

"Solitaire is not asleep," yawned Solitaire. "Because she knows there is more."

"And there at Peranelios Hans told King Dagobert the entire situation like an honest fellow, concluding: 'Therefore, your paramount Majesty, do with me whatever you will.' King Dagobert made him Chancellor of the Exchequer.

"Mennoc Moses—well, he drowned his troubles by marrying an astringent sorceress named Miss Givings, and they lived happily ever after, but the others in the story were a mite too young to do that. Are you asleep? . . .

"Are you asleep? . . . Mm, fair enough."

She would wake, to eat supper when he or the Professor brought it upstairs for the three of them. Then if the Professor's eyes besought her, she would give him the play-acting touch of the whip that was one of his needs, for it was a part of Solitaire's madness that she had learned a kindness toward what passes for madness in others. And she would then fall into the true sleep of night, from which she might rouse at midnight to put away those shears. Demetrios found it good to wait on her. Indeed a good life in most respects. What a pity—damn that policeman!—that anything should disturb it.

The image of Angus Bridgeman walked through his mind, beautiful and proud, gazing down from the summit of youth with curiosity and perhaps tenderness. Rain on the rooftop was lashed by a returning storm-wind that moved again toward quiet.

VI

The Shards of a broken Mirror

—and I too remember what never was, the Golden Age.
—MAM ESTELLE, HER DIARY.

Demetrios woke to the vermilion and gold of sunrise. Solitaire had risen in the night as usual to tidy the room, and would have sat a while by the window letting her thoughts reach after the storm-wrack when the stars came out. Now she slept in brown arms. The Professor would be approaching fifty, Solitaire nineteen or twenty; both looked like tender children.

Demetrios dressed in discreet silence and drifted down the stairs, refreshed. The giggles and squeals and running about of a work-night at Mam Estelle's, the occasional sob or slap or outcry, seldom disturbed his rest. He had not dreamed of Angus during the night hours: if the dreams of sleep would come to us at our command, who would ever wake?

In the large kitchen Mam Estelle was enjoying the early hours. An Old-Time aluminum kettle sang on the iron top of the brick wood-burner—stoves, some call them. In 47 not too many stoves could be found with those good cast-iron tops and easy-lifted lids; Mam Estelle had ordered hers from the notorious Salvage Company of Nupal,

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down the coast. "A good morning to you, man Demetrios!" The sage black cat was weaving and surging optimistically about Mam Estelle's ankles—cupboard love, perhaps, but Jenny took it seriously as a fine art. "This is early time for you, a'n't it?"

"It is. Good morning to yourself, Stell."

Mam Estelle was never hazed in the mornings. While the rest of the house would sleep till noon after the erotic tumult of the night, she and Jenny were up and had the world to themselves. Loveliest time of day, said Estelle: only time you can think. Her thought poured into her diary, a stream determining its own course.

Jenny was between litters, her spring output given away. Nuber thought highly of its cats. The big evil gray rats were no longer seen, driven out by the small dark-rufous ones, possibly mutants. The cats alone prevented the new breed from becoming a serious plague.

Dealing with the Salvage Company of Nupal gave Estelle no qualms. The charming kettle had come from there, the fine cast-iron skillets, most of the andirons in the bedroom fireplaces, and the noble two-level plant-stand in the sunroom that the customers never ceased to admire. In its rectangular upper section Mam Estelle grew pansies and marigolds; two tall healthy marawans spread up from the oval lower part. The stand was clear white without a flaw, a kind of porcelain nobody knows how to make nowadays. Demetrios and Estelle, having both grown up partway in what folk still sometimes call the 20th Century, remembered the earlier function of these plant-stands, wistfully too, in the chill of the outhouse on winter mornings. Living in one century with a root-stub of memory in another, you must be mindful of the tender place where the graft is joined.

The Salvage Company sends its mule-wagons with well-armed crews to just about every part of the known world where decaying Old-Time roads or the dusty new ones can lead them, searching out any kind of junk or treasure the Company might sell for a profit. You hear stories about the collection crews stealing and watergating and so on. It's a dead-end trade of course, with that end in sight. In 47 the Company was thinking about starting a foundry, with charcoal from the Nupal forests and ore out of iron mines up north abandoned as unprofitable in Old Time; they also considered swallowing some of the small industries growing up in the town of Maplestock. Mostly scuttlebutt—but you never know, about Nupal. Though included in the King's Republic by the treaty of Maplestock in Year 21, Nupal cherishes a persnickety half-independence, and is not about to give Nuber the time of day unless there's a dollar in it. "Town Hall," said Demetrios on his way to the outhouse—"Ech!"

"That license thing you spoke about?"

"Ayah, may the idiot who started it be enlightened with a dry cob. Is there paper out there?"

"I trust," said Estelle with dignity, but added more meekly: "Well, that paper we get from

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Maplestock is dreadful cheap stuff—it goes fast, and I did use some for—for writing. Notes, you know."

"Never mind, dear—in Old Time there was too much paper. We were choking on it, my father used to say."

"Sit you down, Dimmy," she said on his return. Jenny jumped into his lap and worked pointed toes. "I'll do you an egg."

"Bless you, if it a'n't too much trouble."

"Tsha-sha," said Mam Estelle, patting his arm. She was sixty-five—a young mother eighteen years old in a Connecticut factory town when the world fell apart. "License for storytelling! I don't know what way the world's drifting. Some time the Inner City people will go too far—snooping, interfering. And tax, tax, tax!" She broke the egg delicately into the pan. In her mornings Mam Estelle was inclined toward a soberly revolutionary outlook, too troublesome to maintain later during the crawling afternoons and evenings when she needed the consolations of the corn spirit.

"A nice brown egg," said Demetrios, "from Somerville's gang I expect. Obadiah's girls are coasting toward soup, Bab says." To Demetrios the chickens in the two backyard flocks, under supervision of the peppery red rooster Somerville and grave gray-barred Obadiah, were valued acquaintances, though Babette had the task of caring for them and permitted no interference. Demetrios minded the cow Julia.

Estelle was not so readily diverted. "Dimmy, I even wonder if it's safe to keep my diary. Some fella comes snooping, say it's a time when I don't feel too good, maybe have too much tea in me. Say he makes off with my locked book because some bloody new law says he can, and there's me indiscreet soul laid bare. For the vultures. No respect for my gray hairs if they say it's subversion—now that's for to kiss my arse, truly! What's in Nuber worth subverting, hanh?"

"You a'n't gray," said Demetrios. "Lookit your pretty brown hair alongit my real gray. Bring your tea and sit down, Estelle. Tell me about your locked book, if you want to."

"Nay, Dimmy." She brought him his tea; stooped behind him to kiss the top of his head, clutching his long, badly combed thatch. But she had changed her mind about having more tea herself, and pottered about the kitchen with needless tidying—Babette kept everything in trim order. "Nay, oftentimes I think I want to talk about it, but some-way I never can. (You don't want out, Jenny.) It's just a book, a sort of—book. (Okay, so you want out.) And this is my time to go be with it." But she lingered in the doorway of her bedroom off the kitchen, troubled about Demetrios' day. Her room was originally a kitchen store-room; she cherished it as a deer-mouse her nest, and no one except Babette was ever invited into it. Its one window faced east across the kitchen garden, and mornings came to her fresh and young.

"Don't apologize," said Demetrios. "I'll wash up my plate and

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stuff. You go be with your book."

She stood there a bit longer, sober-eyed, maybe longing to hear herself telling what stays beyond words—we keep trying. One subject is love, another is loneliness. No language exists for either except a few words and fewer lucky marriages of words that reflect bits of truth like shards of a broken mirror. "Well, don't get into trouble," she said, and closed her door.

THE shortest way from Redcurtain Street to the Town Hall, the way Demetrios chose, takes you through Gallows Square, where you may see—you can't help seeing—the gallows, pillory, whipping-post. This is the same gallows that bore Abraham's wheel lashed to its cross-bar so that he might hang in the public view as a warning to other enemies of the State. Some say it was not even intended he should die. The dreary tenements and shops surrounding Gallows Square also date from Abraham's time, squalid slattern buildings not redeemable by anything but the fire that is bound to take them sooner or later: what can Nuber's bucket brigade do when that heap of tinder and dry rot catches a spark? And some of the people who nowadays lean out the windows to study the particulars of a fresh whipping or hanging must have elbowed seventeen years ago for good places to watch Abraham on the wheel. Many would have died in the natural way of things—it isn't a good-humored world just now, so brawls would have accounted for some; others would have been taken by smallpox, cholera, yellow fever. Some may have just gone away, leaving room for newcomers who would observe another dying Abraham with the same uneasy excitement, and perhaps stone him.

Leaving Gallows Square you climb a couple of steep blocks and behold the Town Hall. Situated at the beginning of the pyramidal rise of Inner City, it is a fairly nasty hunk of architecture, a two-story blockhouse with a couple of fake pillars framing the door, the whole surmounted by a square bell-tower that would look excellent if it weren't twice too large for the building. It was built to accommodate a magnificent Old-Time bronze bell saved from the ruin of some church and dating back to the year uh-huh. The phony pillars rise the full two stories; if they were real instead of slabs of lath and plaster, they could readily support the whacking great architrave that ain't there, but since they just cling to the building like bandages on a sore knee, there's room between them for a little piss-elegant porch called The Balcony, from which statesmen may address their public. The mess as a whole suggested to Demetrios a 19th Century style that must have been fading at the end of that lamented era, but left its mark, even in Missouri. What idiot revived it for the King's Republic in the Year 24 Post-Holocaust when the Town Hall was built, may never be known. Never mind—that damn bell-tower is *good*.

Squatting before its green, which is spacious, well-kept, and rather pretty with the grass regularly scythed, the Town Hall is one of the

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four entrances through the wall, eight feet high, that completely encircles Inner City and Mount Everlasting. You go through the central corridor of the building and—if you have a pass or walk in the company of a citizen of Inner City—step out on the lovely wide avenue that runs all the way around just inside the wall: it's called Wall Street. The wall itself makes a fringe around the base of the pyramid, approximately twelve miles in circumference. Nature built the pyramid out of the primal rock and men put the knobs on it. The wall angles up and down and all over the place as the flanks of the hills demand, but the pyramidal shape is always evident, reinforced by a triangular stone tower at the summit of Mount Everlasting. This was built to Simon Bridgeman's order because (he said) he wanted to watch the new world coming to him. It was the last of his brain's creations that he saw completed: he never moved into the sumptuous apartments high up in the fifty-foot tower, for he was murdered a week after the last brick was tamped into place, and Brian I, First Dictator of the King's Republic of Katskil (who liked simplified spelling because it saved time and was the only kind he knew) decreed that the tower should stand as an everlasting monument on Mount Everlasting, sacred to the memory of that great and good spirit Simon Bridgeman (deceased), savior of his people, prophet of the new world. Amen, the winds blow upon it, in 47 the tower apartments were occupied by Brian II, his queen and concubines, and Demetrios wasn't gosemplacing anywhere beyond the Town Hall this morning.

He climbed the short rise to the green, only a little out of breath. Already the day had grown sultry, as though he brought with him a contagious sadness from Gallows Square. A few benches on the green were occupied by loafers; the police cleared them out at sundown and they drifted back in the quiet hours. A rag doll was lying on the grass—what sort of child would abandon a friend in that state? Demetrios gave it sanctuary on an empty bench, legs decently disposed. He saw a bland yellow bitch trot to the Town Hall, her hind quarters nudged by a zealous black cur who checked and mounted her on the front step while three lesser males attended; she looked patient and intent. A policeman came down the steps with a broom but only leaned on it. "Where do I go to see about a license?"

"WHAT kind of license?"

"For storytelling."

"You must be nuts."

"I'm told it's required now."

"Oh—ayah. Second door on the right, ask the sergeant."

Demetrios walked between the pasted-on pillars into the acid urinary smell of small-town virtue. Entering that second door he found the human sludge of the night gathered to wait disposal. The only furnishings of the narrow room were two eight-foot benches, a desk flanked by an Old-Time brass spittoon, a heavy chair, a heavy sergeant to sit in it. At the far end was a closed door painted with the word LUTENENT. Waiting were three old drunks, one of them a palsied crone

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with bloodshot lower lids who might already be dwelling nearly beyond the reach of pain, a shabby fortyist man mumbling to his fingers and alert against eavesdroppers, and a weedy youth with appalled eyes perhaps still high on marawan. All of them made Demetrios think of patients waiting in a clinic—Dr. Justice is busy right now. The drunks would be put to soak in loneliness for a day or two, the jumpy mutterer might be anything, the youth would likely be turned loose with a warning unless his night's enterprises had involved serious personal injury or watergating. Demetrios had noted, over the years, how the city-state of Nuber was oddly lacking in civilization's usual chronic resentment of the young. So few of them nowadays!—maybe Old Time ought not to have considered them expendable like plastic dolls—cannon-fodder—vietnamable.

Now all five, plus Demetrios himself, must simply wait, until they knew every crack in the plaster of these walls, every dubious lump of shadow in the straw and sawdust on the stone floor. The nasty power to make people wait and wait is a built-in feature of all bureaucracies; whether the hazy autocrat at the summit is a monarch, an oligarchy, or a so-called sovereign people, the psychological smell of the waiting-room is everywhere the same.

"I came to see about a license for storytelling—" maybe he should not have addressed the desk sergeant thus directly. The man went on writing. Demetrios had half-expected this routine discourtesy, stereotype of petty authority. It was irritating not to be able to read the sergeant's squiggles upside down: maybe the poor fellow was trying to finish a book. After more dippings in the inkwell his quill halted but was not laid aside.

"Who'd you say you are?"

"I am Demetrios. I'm told I need a license for storytelling."

To meet the sergeant's sullen gaze was to peer down a well at frog-eyes. He said at last: "Can't you for Christ's sake find a place to sit down? You have to see the lieutenant—I got nothing to do with licenses."

"What lieutenant?"

"Like-man, we got only one on duty." As a concession to stupidity, the desk sergeant waved his pen at the door in the rear.

"When can I see Lieutenant Likeman?"

"Lieutenant Brome—oh, you think you're being funny?"

"No."

"Don't. Lieutenant Brome is busy. Wait your turn."

Demetrios sat by the worried youth. "Another warm day."

"No talking in here!" said the desk sergeant.

The boy inched away—*he* hadn't been talking, but what about guilt by association? Perhaps unseen Lieutenant Brome was eight feet tall. An hour oozed on into past time.

A single gray-paned window, where a black blowfly zizzed a bumbling prayer for more light, faced northward unacquainted with the sun. The swelling warmth of the day collected here nevertheless, squeezing forth antique smells to

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haunt the air. For a quarter-hour the weedy youth practised rolling a marble along the back of his hand, catching it in the soiled cuff of his shirt, until the sergeant groaned: "Quit that, will you?" The nervous man mumbling at his fingers jumped as if slapped. A side-glance at Demetrios from the boy renewed their frail companionship in sin; behind his hand the kid amiably shaped immortal words: "Fuck'em all!"

At last, the others disposed of, he was sent in to Lieutenant Brome and returned soon as Demetrios had expected, playing the legerdemain with his marble in plain sight. A sly wink for Demetrios and he was gone, whistling. The others had not returned this way: no doubt Lieutenant Brome's office had darker exits. The desk sergeant sighed: "You can go in now."

Friday, July 19, 47.

Down to the Town Hall dreadful early this Morning about the Bloody License Thing, please sweet God don't let him get Cross with them and rar up at them in his Pride that's going to get him into Trouble one day, he ought not to be plagued with that Shit and him getting on in years, and I to remember what never was, the Golden Age, when I lived at No. 2 Shannon Street with Sam and Steven and Leda, and there was Marcus my Baby: How it was, we said All of us was to be his Parents and that was cool, why do I say it never was? Sam he is as plain to me now, his Red Hair and his Long Legs and his ugly nice Jaw you could hang your Hat on, plain as my wrinkled Hand holding this Pen, and there was always Marcus, Sam's Baby and Mine, though Stevie was always Best on the Mattress but never Loved me near so much—Marcus with Curls of yellow going thisoway and thatoway all over his Head like darling Half-Hoops of Gold only made out of Mist you would think when you touched them, that fine and soft they were, how could I write as if it all never was? Marcus he's dead but he lived, he lived to be Almost Three, I was fifteen when I Bore him, this I know, never mind, it was a Golden Age. And if Marcus lived they all lived, Sam and Leda and Steven, and we had this House at No. 2 Shannon Street cheap on account of near the Underpass and no Ground only a Postage-Stamp like of Front Yard. Most of the Bread, well, it come from Steven that had this Job at the Shoe Factory and just took the Shit like Day after Day so as we could have the Bread, and me and Sam and Leda we was on Welfare they called it, and there was People made like a Profession of it, I never liked that.

Sam he would have his Guitar, and Leda and me could sing, Steve said I was a Natural Alto. Oftentimes Abe Logan that had been Stevie's Lover and still was sort of, he would come stay a week or two, and he had a Recorder and knew a lot of Ancient Things that Steve knew too, see, they had been together on Radio once. Things called Madrigles for an instance, and Sam could figure out Guitar Parts for them, you never heard no Thing so pretty as when we all got like turned on with the Madrigles.

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About this reaching back, I tell myself Stell, you better not reach back, you better not. Marcus he was Real-Crazy for the Madrigles and would go Laughing and Dancing and Strutting Around to the Music showing off his handsome little Penis which he'd just lately discovered it, which Sam wouldn't let the Doctor talk us into getting him Circumscribed, it was Goddamn Foolishness Sam said, all they want is the Dollars. Marcus—well-naturally Everything was a new Discovery for my Marcus, you could say he grew up to Three Years Old with Singing and Dancing. Oh it was hard to wean him!—his Mouth was a Kiss of Red Honey and the Sunshine Loved Him.

LIEUTENANT Brome looked downright winsome in his apparent desire to soothe and please. "Sorry you had to wait, sir. That fool should have let me know you were here. Demetrios, isn't it? Heard you once or twice. Pity about this license thing, but the utopia has to be run on certain principles, you understand I'm sure. Have a marawan candy? I agree, too early in the day; sometimes I take one though, strain of the job and so on. Doing much storytelling these days?" He leaned back at his desk, a bland face inviting Demetrios into the company of the shrewd who know how the world goes, a bit of yielding here, a bit of sweetening there, no hurt feelings, everybody happy. He was square and sallow, Lieutenant Brome, clean under the fingernails but a little bloated in the belly, soggy in the face, an athlete gone to slack.

"I was storytelling before 1993."

"Before when?—oh, that. We don't talk about that, you know. Looking back is unutopian. Looking back, what d'you find?—nothing but the outworn ideas, Demetrios: democracy instead of utopian law and order, monarchy instead of the utopian king's republic, all that damned socialistic permissiveness instead of utopian ethics, which thank God the present Administration is going to look out for, lots better, from here on." Demetrios felt a new chill. "Thank God," said the Lieutenant earnestly, "we're beginning to learn what it *means* to run things on strictly utopian principles! And get rid of any damned subversion that shows its head." But after this fervent declaration of politico-religious conviction, Lieutenant Brome again relaxed, a reasonable, practical fellow, watching Demetrios with the earnest, half-affectionate intentness of a fisherman who sees the float jerked downward by the dimly seen victim. He went on presently: "Demetrios, I suppose you understand how a government run on utopian principles can't very well put up with *random, unregulated* storytelling, that could undermine the very foundations of freedom and utopianism? Um . . . One great mistake they made in Old Time—see, how do you think you're going to protect freedom of speech if you let just anybody talk the way he likes, umm?" *And the horror of it is, he does not expect me to laugh, could not tolerate my laughter. He has dried up the fountains of my laughter. Oh, if universes are infinite, there is one where old Demetrios*

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has the courage to rise up, and hold off this manikin with his walnut stick long enough to piss on all his neatly stacked papers and wash them away down a stream of laughter. And another where Brome himself can see the joke, and piss off his own stream of laughter, wash the whole damned world clean with laughter. But the devil of it is, that's always some other universe, never the one we're stuck with, where there's no such laughter, maybe none at all . . . The Lieutenant had spoken some further words, so quietly, like a murmured afterthought, that Demetrios was obliged to ask him to repeat. "I said, Demetrios, the license costs only twenty dollars."

"Twenty?"

"Twenty."

"Sir, that's annihilation. As janitor of the most respected sex-house on Redcurtain Street, I earn four dollars a week—generous pay but not princely. As storyteller with my cap on the pavement, why, I can pick up maybe another two dollars, if the weather's good and I go out five or six days. My expenses come close to my income. I have no savings worth mentioning."

"It's a shame," said the Lieutenant. "If it was up to me I'd allow for such difficulties." His face took on the inward-listening glaze of one suddenly gifted by an original insight, a shining splendor for which he found suitable words: "See, I don't write the laws." The luminous nature of this presentment led him to even more exalted heights: "You can't make a utopia without breaking eggs . . . Of course in some cases the inevitable, uh, hardships can be, we might say, minimized, in return for—I hardly know how to phrase it—"

"How much of what?"

"What?"

"What have I got that would make it worth your while to let me go on as I am, doing my job, telling my stories, and minding my own fucking business?"

"We're very direct this morning, aren't we?" said Lieutenant Brone, and giggled, tapping his fingers on the desk.

"Is it still morning?"

Lieutenant Brome stood up and stretched. He opened and closed the two doors of his office, glancing into the sergeant's office and a side-corridor, apparently for listeners. "A man can't help it if he's kept busy," he said mildly. "It's about eleven o'clock." He returned to his desk, popping another candy in his mouth. "Just offhand—" nothing would ever be offhand with Brome—"how many other storytellers in Nuber belong to the Society of Disciples?"

The bell-tower hummed and roared and trembled to a music drumming down to the rock, eleven pulses of a Titan's heart. When he could be heard, Demetrios said: "Haven't the slightest damned idea."

"Come now, Demetrios. The more you fence with me the more of your valuable time I'll have to waste. You asked what you have that might be worth my while. Not much; but for certain kinds of information you might be, let us say, let off the hook—the legal hook, mind you. Mean to say, I'll tell you frankly and freely, Demetrios, I'm

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not altogether unimportant in Inner City."

"But I have almost no connection with the other storytellers." Demetrios struggled with disbelief, the stunned incredulity of one who supposed a drowsing tiger was soft because he looked so. "We are loners mostly. Artists can't organize, it isn't our nature."

The fingers tapped; uncharitable eyes gazed anywhere except at Demetrios' face. "The new statute gives me authority to inquire into the activities of, I quote: 'public storytellers and other persons of no occupation . . .' How long have you known Jon Seberling?"

"I never heard of him."

"Odd. He knows you." The fingers ceased tapping and wrote in a black book, the expensive kind bound in heavy paper covers, that the factory over in Maplestock had begun to turn out in some quantity that year. "Mark Walton? . . . Edna McEloi?"

"I know of Walton, though I never met him. I've heard McEloi sing, and tell one very unpolitical fairytale to an audience that was mostly children . . . Lieutenant, may I say that storytelling is an occupation?"

"Indeed. But you are presently employed," stated the voice above the wiggling fingers, "as janitor in the Public Entertainment Facility registered under the name of 'Mam Estelle's'?"

"Of course."

"Of the customers at that Facility, what proportion are Inner City residents?"

"I haven't a notion."

"Indeed. Of the employees of that Facility, how many are members of the Society of Disciples?"

"None that I know of." But Fran was, and Babette had gone to one or two of the Disciples' secret Love-Feasts. *Do I get out of here in time to warn them?* The fingers worked on.

"The Mam Estelle Facility employs male prostitutes?"

"My recollection is that the term 'prostitute' was outlawed by the same statute that established the Facilities of Redcurtain Street. The Facility has had no male entertainers since that became illegal four years ago."

"Throughout recorded history," the Lieutenant recited above his busy fingers, "the Crime Against Nature has been illegal, recognized as the Devil's best method of destroying Humanity by race suicide: this is Scientific Fact. It has therefore, naturally, never been legal in Nuber." Demetrios sat quiet. The Public Entertainment Facilities dated back to the days of Simon Bridgeman who had openly loved both women and boys. Brian I had not wished to disturb them, and so far Brian II had not dared. But Demetrios was being reminded that you don't argue with the rewriters of history. "By the way, Demetrios—and I wish you'd see your way to being a little more cooperative—do you know whether the Society of Disciples is still renting out the use of its illicit hand-press?"

"Oh—do they have one?"

The Lieutenant sighed and put down his quill. Simulated geniality had vanished. "You spoke of it in your curious discourse of yesterday, on Harrow Street, which was, in the

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public interest, reported to me—by the way, what's your last name? Can't seem to find it anywhere in my records, which isn't very nice for somebody."

"You amaze me. My last name is Freeman." The Lieutenant wrote that down. "Yesterday, Lieutenant, I think I mentioned the existence of the hand-press in Inner City, known to everyone, which prints the journal *Hermes* and other legally permitted material. If I mentioned the possibility of another press somewhere, it was not from any personal knowledge of such a thing—I only passed on a rumor."

"Which can be dangerous and irresponsible. Well, between the years 33 and 43—correct me if I'm wrong—you were in the habit of publicly giving supposedly factual accounts of the death of Abraham Brown, of foreign origin, in Gallows Square of this city, in the year 30. This is correct?"

"I was in Gallows Square and saw him die. I told of it a few times during those ten years, yes, at the request of people who wished to hear it."

"But not, at least not in public, for the last four years?"

"Not in public nor in private."

"Why not?"

"I felt that interest in the story had become morbid, perhaps had always been so; that the actual truth was not welcome. Telling it therefore didn't seem to be in the public interest."

"And how do you come to be the judge of the public interest?"

"Every citizen is a judge of the public interest."

"Interesting," said the Lieutenant, and wrote it down, murmuring the words under his breath. "Isn't it fair to assume, my dear Demetrios, that you have repeated the story *very* privately, say to your intimates, or—umm—or at the secret meetings of the Society of Disciples? Umm?"

"I am not a liar. I have never attended any of their meetings, if they hold any. I have not recited the story of Abraham's martyrdom to any audience since the year 43."

"Demetrios, you may go." The Lieutenant's flat upward stare said without much equivocation: *Pray accept my gift of enough rope.* Demetrios rose, leaning on his walnut stick. "Nay, come back a moment, man Demetrios."

"You are not entitled to address me so."

"I stand corrected." The Lieutenant smiled. "Demetrios, if by any chance you happen to tell again the story of Abraham Brown according to your lights, with or without the license we mentioned, it will be your misfortune. I consider this a fair warning. Understood?"

"Have a good day," said Demetrios, and turned his back on him. Perhaps the time was not remote when there would be a Brome dynasty, and it wouldn't do to turn your back. Demetrios walked out past the sergeant, into the newly cherished presence of the sun.

VII

The Prophet Abraham came from another Country

But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem.

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weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. —*LUKE, 23; 28.*

THE boy had said: "Will you meet me here again? Tomorrow, near to noontime?" So now to the Meadows, the lawn before Paddy's Place, from which one looked through a break in the hills to a meeting of sea and sky. *Am I late?*

Normal eyes could discover that horizon harmony; not the wide, nearsighted eyes of Angus Bridgeman. Such eyes, thought Demetrios, possessed a different way of seeing—his own were still 20-20, his knowledge of defective vision theoretical. *Am I late?* The 20th Century had automatically assumed "normal" vision to be "correct", the one and only, a characteristic half-truth. And how easily the old technology would have given Angus lenses! But lens-grinding was one of the taken-for-granted arts not provided for when Simon Bridgeman and his colleagues burrowed into the mountain. Normal vision would be a mighty convenience for Angus, increasing his share of safety in a world crawling with stealthy shadows—well, not many external shadows could be stealthy enough to evade the incorruptible eyes and nose of Brand—so yes, certainly, the kid ought to have glasses. Was not Leeuwenhoek, that distinguished friend of Vermeer, perfecting his wonderworking lenses far back there in the 17th Century? And with lenses, Angus would soon despise and forget the special vision of his myopia . . . Was Vermeer nearsighted?—no answer; truth inaccessible under three hundred and seventy-five years of historical sludge, including forty-seven years of modern barbarism and another two hundred when nobody noticed that as a painter he was rather good.

But Angus couldn't have his lenses. *Am I late?* As he stood disconsolate on the lawn, a worm of pain stirred in the vague country of heart or stomach and crawled toward his gut where its transit apparently ended. He couldn't be late of course. The Town Hall had shivered to the eleventh hour of morning during his ordeal with the Lieutenant less than an hour ago, and up here at the Meadows only half a mile away, he couldn't have failed to hear the prodigious bronze bell declaring noon. To worry about lateness was senile fuss. He leaned against one of the fine maples bordering the lawn. Over at the Temple a few idlers had gathered, Angus not among them.

At noon and midnight the entire city throbbed and ached to the full twelve strokes of that overwhelming voice. The knotty hands of the blind bell-ringer Blind Bailey would be guided to the rope by Little Reuben—Bailey needed no such guidance; it was simply one of their acts of love. For part of each night, folk said, Blind Bailey would sit cross-legged with the bell-rope at his shoulder, so that Little Reuben might sleep. Blind Bailey followed a clock in his brain as accurate as any mechanical marvel: to him the hours yielded their seconds and minutes with the patience of dripping icicles in the sun.

Folk said little enough about what would happen when Blind

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Bailey died—he was old; it might happen any minute—and the bell *must* be rung in some efficient, up-to-date manner by slobs like you and me. Some suggested Little Reuben could manage by himself, since he wasn't really a natural but merely a mite unsteady in his wits: it would make him happy, these theorists argued, to carry on Blind Bailey's work. Another school of thought replied, Not bloody likely.

ONE—The blow of the hour rolled to him over the rise of ground and some *TWO*—some white-clad shape simplified with distance crossed golden grass near the Temple *THREE*—but no hound strode with that man; he showed not the shining grace of Angus *FOUR*—Angus in fellowship with daylight . . . *Oh, he won't FIVE—won't come to me. He's forgotten, though he, himself it is, did speak of SIX—of meeting, almost as if he loved me. And what can I give that should SEVEN—should make him honor such a promise? Dry cakes of wisdom, no wine of EIGHT—of youth to sweeten them. The promise was made during a moment in the NINE—unexplored country of meeting. Can love be a trade? This I TEN—I take, this I give—what folly! Love is not any Thing, but love [if ELEVEN—love exists] must be that country where we go to meet—to meet—TWELVE—where we go to meet the only saving mercy—*

Demetrios walked toward the Temple, near enough to verify once more what his eyes knew quite well: Angus was not there. Demetrios would have found him at once, as your eye cannot evade the glory of a cardinal sudden in the leaves. Another worm of pain crept after the first into forgetfulness. What he needed was a good sneeze, a cough, a roll in the hay. What he needed was a god-damn drink.

He entered Paddy's Place, scanning the cool retreat, the bar, the little booths, open tables on the floor's fresh sawdust, instantly recording the already known sadness: *Angus isn't here.* Paddy, wiping the bar, observed him with politely silent curiosity; his smile a modest widening of the frog mouth—you expected it to open at sight of a penny-insect with the zip of a lightning tongue.

A pair of nondescript men, travelers likely, overnight guests, were eating lunch or late breakfast in a booth, where they chewed on some private subject in undertones. Paddy's Place was the most prosperous hostel in Outer City, located on what in 47 was already being called the Long Road. It comes from somewhere in the north, passing through Maplestock and Kingstone, touching Nuber at the Meadows, angling down into the city under the name of Main Street, and proceeding southward through wilderness to Sofran. There it must bear west, away from the areas of desolation, and so into Penn, which they say is a republic, though not a King's Republic. The only other customer in the bar was an old fellow beginning a deep soak in Paddy's beer. "A good day, Paddy," Demetrios said, and raised his foot to the comfort of the rail. "If you know something good about it."

"Why, the sun shines, man

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Demetrios—oyah, I mean it would if I'd persuade me new slut to wash the windows. What'll it be?"

"Shines from force of habit, man Paddy, like the joe who couldn't stop grinning when they cut his head off because it made him forget what the joke was. Corn spirit, Paddy, I need a touch of corn spirit."

Paddy reached for the jug. "You're dark blue today, yourself it is. The way I heard it, he couldn't tell them the joke because he was short of breath. But things look nice after the rain."

"The tears of Jesus on Calvary. The pee of Zeus. The floods of Old Time at Aberedo."

"Oyah." Paddy resumed his day-long wiping of the bar. "Aberedo?"

"A town in Penn, where I stopped once." Demetrios drank, pushing his coin about in a puddle from the bottom of the glass. "Maybe you was never there."

"Nor heard of it."

"Refill, dear soul. I'll drink slow, trouble you no more."

"No trouble, sir."

"Sirring me, you Irish monster? Why, old Quixote's armor is scattering rust like red dandruff. Time, mind you, is not the only cause of it: the fella was born old." The (other) old drinker was deep-sunk in his beer dream. Older than Demetrios, he too would have been born in the age of plastic and subsidized corruption: maybe the dragons, magicians, imperilled beauties of his fantasy were powered by internal combustion, wore white lab coats and garments by Saks 5th Avenue. The travelers, done with their conference, sat heavy with digestion, picking their teeth with splinters—why, by nightfall, if they had good horses, they could be twenty or thirty miles from Nuber—

SO, DEMETRIOS! *You could have wandered away from Nuber any time in the last forty-odd years, but always found some reason why not—maybe sprouting from a delusion that there's really no world beyond it. To leave it is to enter a mist. But there were substantial reasons. There was Elizabeth of Hartford, sweet none-too- bright Elizabeth who was like a wife or better for eight years after George and Laura moved away, until she died giving birth to the big-skulled mue which also, by one of the occasional mercies of nature, could not live. There was the Orgy Decade, the Twenties, my thirties, aftermath of the Red Plague when nearly everyone in Nuber believed the end of the human race was at hand—but this time really-truly, as it always has been of course—and so one might as well try and try for some new way of touching off an explosion in the genitals, calling this action Life as if other happenings were something less than life. But the nervous system can shudder only just so much, so what else is going? Why, to us in the Year 30 the prophet Abraham came from another country, Abraham who believed like other holy men of other ancient times, that something he called the love of something he called God was bigger than either the dollar or the orgasm. I don't know. You can't spend an abstrac-*

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tion to buy you bread. You can't love an abstraction, but only other individual human persons—love directed elsewhere ceases to deserve the name, and may become poison or nonsense, or perhaps a kind of mental masturbation that can't come. Anyhow they butchered him.

Why could you not be here, Angus? Your nearness alone might almost content me, even if you never desired to touch me. But your absence is a thorn in the heart that teaches me I love you.

The prophet Abraham came from another country—

Demetrios pushed coin and empty glass away, and let his walnut stick thump the sawdust as he made for the door. He nodded to those travelers, who lifted their mugs amiably, guessing perhaps that Demetrios understood country roads and open skies. "Have a good day, all," he said, and stepped into a wave of sunlight, which transfigured the Temple and its shingled entablature so that it did seem a fantasy-glimpse of the Parthenon in the shade of Mount Everlasting.

He strode down to it, his eye (professional though a mite drunk) assessing the crowd. Mostly young or youngish; no babies prepared to let fly with howls in the midst of dramatic passages. Another white-clad man was coming down the avenue that curved from the south-east gate of Inner City, the route that Angus would probably use. But it wasn't Angus. Just another stranger who, as Demetrios halted to observe, unobtrusively spoke to the handful of others in the crowd who wore the white tunics. And then by ones and twos, with too much unconcern, they were drifting back up the avenue to that south-east gate, the careful messenger being the last to depart. *Something is happening in the Inner City. Where Angus lives. News will trickle down to us in time, whatever we are allowed to know.*

Smoldering grief at the boy's absence, smoldering wrath at Lieutenant Brome, at the law which is an ass, mixed with the corn spirit and the morose sultriness of July. A few eyes in the placid crowd were already asking: Will the old boy give us a tale?

He rested his back against a pillar of the Temple, his bones familiar with every bump of the bricks. Two weeks ago he had lounged here giving them Hans Andersen's *Little Mermaid* as it came through the lens of his memory. *"Demetrios, if by any chance you happen to tell again the story of Abraham Brown according to your lights—"* he dropped his cap upside down at his feet—*"with or without that license we—"*

"HEAR me who speak to you: I tell how the prophet Abraham came from another country.

"He was born, dear souls, in a town named Bethel in the state of Maryland. This was in 1988, five years before the Destruction. Of Bethel he remembered only the name and random childhood images, for his family moved to Ohio and he was there, a child of five, when one of the bombs removed the city of Washington from history. These things he told me in a quiet conversation, the day before he was betrayed.

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"Abraham was not hard to talk to. We chatted comfortably, as might any two men with a few common interests. He did not condemn my agnosticism though his mind would not allow him to understand it. He was a man of middling height, with reddish beard and sandy hair worn shoulder-length. Blue-eyed he was, simple of speech, and it seemed to me most of his followers had acquired traces of his simplicity. They were a little army of fifty saints, the majority of them children. Painted on their white tunics they displayed the symbol of a wheel crossed out by two strokes, to express their belief that God had declared against all mechanism. No more machinery, said Abraham, who felt that God spoke through him. No more use of meat, leather, milk, eggs, no more subjection or destruction of other living beings. The idea is older than Buddha and newer than tomorrow. If people must travel, Abraham said, let them walk, as these children had walked with him into the northern wilderness and then south to Nuber. He also proposed to transform Nuber into the New Jerusalem.

"I met that band of the faithful in the orchard of one Cecil Mason, since deceased, who had allowed them the use of it for a campsite after they were admitted through the border posts into Outer City. The orchard is still maintained by the son of Cecil: you can be shown the spot where Abraham's tent was raised. That is the spot where the disciple Jude brought the police of Nuber, and in their presence accused the prophet of planning the overthrow of the state. I had talked a little with Jude also, that day in the orchard. He was then a man inwardly ravaged, though I did not then understand the cause—nor do I now. But I think he acted, not as some say out of greed for tainted money, but from a desire to arrest the world's attention, even its compassion, by acting the part of the chief of sinners: to become the most hated scapegoat, to take on the load of sin by sinning to the uttermost, to reject the wine of life and choke to death on a mouthful of ordure, as a way of saying: 'Behold, O Lord, what I have done for Thee!'

"I spoke too with the disciple Mathias of Gran Gor, who believed Abraham had healed him of the smallpox by a laying on of hands, and believed also that Abraham was the second incarnation of Jesus Christ, only begotten son of God, returned after two thousand years to save the world. Mathias was even then contemplating the task of writing down the story of Abraham's life on earth. He may be engaged in this now: he left Nuber after the martyrdom and I don't know what became of him, nor whether he believes the world has been saved.

"Abraham earned his living as a carpenter up to the twenty-eighth year of his life. This was in some fairly large settlement of survivors in Ohio; he never told me the name of it. He said those were years when his enlightenment strove with his folly, until at length it was clear to him that God and the Devil were battling for his soul. Then into the wilderness went Abraham alone and naked by God's command, and wove himself garments of grass,

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sandals of grass with soles of wood carved by the knife that was his only tool and that had never drawn blood. In a clearing of the forest he made a shelter and a garden sufficient for his needs. I have heard the fairytale about the fox who guided him to edible plants and berries and mushrooms, but Preacher Abraham himself told me no such nonsense. He knew and loved animals too much to falsify them, and because he was quiet, slow-moving, harmless, they came to him. I was not surprised that he knew the legend of St. Francis of Assisi and called St. Francis 'my brother'—and to me at least he never made any claim of supernatural origin. I think his one concern was to tell people how he thought they might live so as to be at peace with themselves and pleasing to the God in whom he believed . . . He lived three years in that shelter in the forest, and was joined by the disciple whose name was John, by another who took the name of Simon, and in the third year, by Jude."

—And I must elbow some room away from Demetrios for my Mam Estelle, and also comment that there's more than one way to skin the ecology. The most learned definition I can find for the word "impractical" is "of or pertaining to whatever won't work because we can't be bothered." It would be practical to live by Abraham's principles, though maybe tedious, if we were mostly Abrahams instead of protein-hungry, rumpleheaded sexpots like you and me and little Cousin Jasper who, when too young to be quoted, did manfully enjoy himself behind the barn with that precocious Lily Littlejohn from down the road. It wasn't just fucking either—Jas had ripped off a hunk of mince pie which they divided, and that little fiend Lily had liberated a far-out pair of turkey drumsticks. Domesticity yet. Now Estelle.

[*more of Friday, July 19*]

HE'S LATE, *but anyway remembered to milk Julia before he left, Babette said. Past Noon now but I won't have my Tea yet a while. I want to just make a Start on turning this Book into the Story of My Life, not just a Diary, for if you write each Day that is like only looking out the Window, but the other thing, the Life Story, that is going up like on a Knoll like the one back of our House in Raeford by the Underpass, well, it had been a Piece of a Park once, there was a busted Bench, I mean up that high you can look for miles.*

So when the House by the Underpass was knocked flat by what they said was Blast from what Happened in New York Fortyfive Miles Away, I was down Cellar looking up a Pint of Peach Pserve. I made it myself, the Pserve, they All liked it. I was caught by half the Floor falling in onto me, one of the Timbers pinned my Leg that it took me an hour or two to fight my Way Loose. See, I knowed the leg was not Broke, something was holding up the Timber a couple-three inches, but I couldn't get free till I was able to tear loose a stick that had splintered off of Something, and pry up the Timber a bit so as I could inch out. There was Cobwebs

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all over the Timber, the gray stuff mixing with the Blood out of my Fingers where I had Trouble with that stick, and a nail stuck out of that goddam timber down into my Leg, tearing deeper into the Calf whiles I was fighting Loose, and ll that time I could hear the Sireens howling and people yelling but like Way Off, and once I guess it was a Fire Truck went by, much good that would do, but in our House nothing at All, and still I knew, Jesus God, they were all there, they had to be There, Stevie and Sam and Leda, and I kept asking, Jesus God, why isn't my Marcus crying, why isn't He? There wasn't anything I could of used to cut my foot off, I had to keep prying with that fucking stick, and so when I did get loose in an hour, two Hours, Whatever, I swear I must of picked up that Pint of Peach Pserve off the Cellar Floor, because I had it in my hand when I scrambled up the wreck of the Stairs and found out what had Happened, how it was. I don't know where I flang the goddam thing. There was the teevy, see, knocked clear across the room, it only hit the back of his head, Marcus his Face was not hurt at all, Sam's throat was cut with the flying glass, you couldn't see how anything had happened to Stevie an Leda but they was both so quiet Dead, it must of been the Blast. I carried Marcus to the top of that Knoll, his Face it was not hurt at all, and I never did know before the long Way you could see from that Knoll, I sat there with my Leg bleeding into a funny red Puddle, Jesus God you could see for miles and miles.

So later when I was working at this House which was Mister Fleur's Establishment in those days till he died and left it to me, why, Men would ask me about the long Scar on my Leg. I never told them, never told Anybody except Babette which is like talking to the Pulse in my own Heart. Might be I ought not to try to write about the Past Things that Happened, but some-way it's like on me to do it, because that type World isn't ever coming back, and maybe People ought to know—now look at me Imagining anybody will ever read This!—I think they ought to know how it wasn't All Good.

"AT THE close of those three years Abraham set forth with his disciples to preach the life of simplicity. One would think that in the aftermath of 1993 human beings should have been ready for it. It did not prove so. A generation had passed—thirty years including the time of the Red Plague. Men and women in their twenties had no personal recollection of the world as it had been, and small faith in their shattered elders' talk about it. People, old and young, wished to live—why, more or less as people always have done: blundering, credulous, self-obsessed; half-educated monkeys with scant thought for the morrow and none for the past. (Aren't we like that, dear souls?—it's hard, tiring work being any more human than that.) When Abraham preached, most listeners stared, muttered, walked away. A few exceptions became loyal followers.

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"Abraham found most of his listeners were children. If he asked himself why, he gave himself only the truistic answers—they were innocent, open-minded, and so on.

"He traveled north through Penn into the nation we now call Moha, and crossed the Hudson Sea with his company on makeshift rafts—there was no reliable ferry in those days south of Ticonderoga—into what we once called New England. He won many more followers there. Everywhere in that land, he told me, he found small communities holding together, some declining, but a few almost prospering in the ancient manner of self-reliance so emotionally despised by self-adoring intellectuals in the sad latter days of Old Time. But the children who slipped away from their families to join him, often following secretly through the woods until they were too far from home to be sent back, were not all recruited from the bored and discontented; many had the true flush of faith—I saw it myself. Abraham soon gave up trying to send the children home, and accepted their devotion as a manifestation of God's will. They came to be called Abraham's Army, or the Roving Ragamuffins, or the Children's Crusade. Weak small settlements feared their approach because they had to eat. They were never thieving, nor disorderly, nor violent. Before the troubles they encountered on Adirondack Island and south of there, they numbered over two hundred.

"The disciple Andrew remained behind in Moha to find a site for the New Jerusalem. There was good country available everywhere, going back to wilderness; but when Andrew rejoined Abraham in the north he also described the city of Nuber, and the prophet turned south with our city for his goal—guided, he told me, by God's voice in a dream.

"He came in the fall of the year, close on the day we celebrate as the Day of Forthcoming, that day when Simon Bridgeman's people left their refuge in the mountain and learned the earth had not been altogether destroyed. Nuber, unlike other towns, had prepared itself with fear and resentment against Abraham's appearance. One Cephas in particular, who was Master of the Carpenters' Guild, had alarmed the people with accounts of Abraham's preaching; and he had found an ancient oaken wagon wheel, and declared that Abraham ought to swing from it in Gallows Square, for threatening to upset the utopia. 'He has crossed out the wheel over his heart,' said Cephas—'let him take it on his back, and let us see if it will roll him into the New Jerusalem.'

"Abraham's legend had grown, dear souls. His horde of hungry children—they were only fifty, after an encounter with smallpox at Gran Gor—was dreaded like a plague of grasshoppers; but that's no full explanation of what happened. Why was Christ hated, who harmed no one? Why do we demand his crucifixion again, and again? Can it be, dear souls, because he said, *Love thy neighbor—?* Pilate found no fault in Jesus, but yielded to the clamor and gave him to the mob. Abraham, true, was officially sentenced by the

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magistrate at the Town Hall, to one hour of public discipline as an enemy of the State; yet Judge Bruecke says to this day that he had no thought of condemning Abraham to death. He intended the fellow should spend an hour in the pillory, no more—and even that, he says, was simply in order to quiet the public unrest.

"Oh, let folk argue it as they argue the thoughts of Pilate, or the thoughts of the archons of Athens. The disciple Jude did bring the officers of the police to the orchard, and stood outside Abraham's tent and called to him. And when Abraham came out Jude kissed his forehead saying, "O my Master!' then the sergeant of police asked: 'Is this the man who declares the city must be destroyed so that another may be built?'

Jude said, 'It is he.'"

Demetrios saw new faces at the Temple, a few. More stragglers were crossing the grass of the Meadows, among them two men in the uniform of the police. Some distance away, but advancing more quickly when he noticed the crowd, a boy or young man in a green shirt. Not Angus, too heavy-set. Garth? Garth ought to be working at the stable. Maybe he had a long noon hour. It was Garth. *Warn him somehow.*

"And they took Abraham before the Magistrate, who questioned him—speaking reasonably, I'm told, even going so far as to explain to Abraham why the State found it necessary to chastise him if he would not admit himself in error. Abraham stood silent.

"And when he was being taken from the Town Hall a crowd led by Cephas seized him from the police, overwhelming them, and lashed his arms to that wheel which they had decked with garlands of briers, and made him carry it to Gallows Square. This I saw, dear souls, with my own eyes, and I saw Judge Bruecke come out on the balcony of the Town Hall and call down to the mob: 'There must be no disorder, no disorder!' A few others beside myself were able to hear him.

"Abraham carried his burden to Gallows Square. There were at this time two malefactors in the pillory, one a thief, the other an unlicensed beggar. Therefore the mob lifted the wheel to the crossbar of the gallows, that Abraham might hang there; and they stoned him. The beggar called to him from the pillory: 'Lord, remember me!' But if Abraham replied the sound was broken by a stone.

"I spoke with a Christian in Gallows Square, who reminded me of a verse in the Gospel of Matthew: *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.* I asked him, How often, how often must Christ be crucified? He was only grieved by my question and left me without responding.

"In the first hour of evening, Abraham cried out: "Where is the New Jerusalem?' I heard one voice answer him out of the dark of the crowd: 'Not here, O my dear Lord, not here!'

"At some time during that hour Abraham died."

TO BE CONTINUED

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Theodore Sturgeon

A LITTLE belatedly I want to tell you about Philip K. Dick's new novel *Flow My Tears The Policeman Said* (Doubleday, $5.95). It is not for nothing that the new rash of academic studies of sf, which may nod in passing to a parade of our greats, give whole pages, whole chapters, to Philip K. Dick. Writing a concise description of one of his books, sketching one of his plots, is like trying to carve a leafless tree in granite. Real and solid (and strange, and far out) as his characters may be, they all exhibit complex traceries of personality quite impossible to predict and sometimes just the other side of the reader's ability to understand. The effect, of course, is the creation of a work that your head won't put down even if your hands do. The policeman here is that rarity, a totally detestable character with whom you must empathize, and with whom, ultimately, you will sympathize as well. But he isn't the protagonist. It isn't his story, though the story could not exist without him. The narrative belongs to Jason Taverner, TV superstar, who awakes in a world in which he has never existed. This is not the first time this unsettling concept has been used but I will guarantee that you won't anticipate the rationale for this one until Dick is good and ready to give it to you.

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And then there's this girl called Alys . . . now, there's one you'll forget about as readily as a tattoo on the back of your hand. Buy this one and brace yourself for a mystery tour. (Mystery tour: a big thing in England. You buy your ticket and get on a bus; you don't know where you're going, but you know you'll get back all right.)

SCULPTOR Sterling E. Lanier's Chilton Hardcover is now in paperback. *Hiero's Journey* (Bantam, 372 pp, with map and glossary, $1.25) is a lot of adventure for the money. Set in a post-atomic world in which mutated animals abound, many of them with extremely high intelligence, it deals with a warrior-priest and his quest for a nigh-legendary device called a "computer". He is accompanied, as the story goes on, by a telepathic bear (who is, to my taste, the most interesting character in the book), a gigantic moose-like mount, and a lost black princess. "Journey" is recognized as a technical term for a certain kind of narrative, wherein the characters move through a strange land (completely under the control of the author) and have unexpected encounters. Heiro is a likable hero and my only cavila are that, as in so many swords-and-sorcery tales, you just know he is going to win, I like a little doubt to spice my suspense, and that his evil opponents are too totally, unrelievedly evil. For all that, it's exhilarating escape reading.

Now, here's a real find. It is, as far as I know, a first novel, and if that's really so, we have a new writer whose launch-pad is built on a very high place indeed. *An Apology for Rain* (Doubleday, $4.95) by Jean Mark Gawron, exemplifies a new thrust in sf that is popping up in new works from all over: the orientation of self in society, and the close and critical examination of reality itself. Phil Dick's novel is certainly an example, and so is Ms. Gawron's. (Lanier's is not, you see: Hiero is as oriented to his strange world as he can be, and the reality of it is as solidly real as the author can make it.) Ms. Gawron's book deals with a post-blast situation too, though in a rather more immediate future. Her protagonist is also a superperson with unusual extra talents but she (a leather-clad girl called Bonnie) knows only partially their nature and extent, and what she is expected to do with them. Her quest, then, is for something interior and totally surprising. Her relationship with her brother, who ghosts about on the perimeter of her adventure, and with the people she meets and deals with, add to her knowledge of her changing situation and always to her knowledge of herself. Gawron commands my vast approval on two counts: a prose style as bright and smooth as stainless steel, and an approach to

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her work as analog, as fable, as an instructive parallel to a great deal of what we, as a tottering culture, must confront or die. One other thing is worth noting and I have had occasion to mention this elsewhere. There is in this book a degree of extreme but perfectly controlled violence that I have seen before only in the works of Josephine Saxton, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Doris Piserchia. I do not know what this means. I know only that no male writer of my acquaintance does exactly this thing quite this well. I say this while still maintaining firmly that gender has nothing to do with quality. A good writer is a good writer whatever. Anyway, do yourself a favor and meet this extraordinary new writer.

WITH our noses in our specialty (limitless though it may be) we run the risk of missing some very good writing from other areas, and it is only when one of them drifts into our vortex from the mainstream that we become aware of it. Such is the case with Marc Brandel and his *The Man Who Liked Women* (Pocket Books, 307 pp., $1.50), the reprint of a 1972 Simon and Schuster novel, a perfectly and thoroughly delightful fantasy about a young American businessman in London from whose brow is born no other than Venus herself. The book seems to have been begun by a high skilled and

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fluent storyteller from an engaging notion which promised a sort of Thorne Smith romp; then in its unfolding, the narrative and especially its heroine suffused the author with love. He then appears to take himself (and her) a good deal more seriously than, perhaps, he had intended. The result is a searching, memorable, deeply touching tale with an ending that can only be described as a sweet ache. There may be greater books around but it's hard for me to name one that I liked more. Do read it.

THERE's one book that troubles me profoundly only because it's so damned good, and what's wrong with it seems to me to have been well within the author's enormous skill to have repaired. Recently serialized here, it's *Inverted World*, by Christopher Priest, (Harper and Row, 240 pp., $6.95) Not since Larry Nevins' *Ringworld* has there been an sf concept as original as Priest's hyperboloid planet. The strange and puzzling city on tracks, which exists only to move and to move again through endless miles of inhospitable country, while weird distortions of space and time precede and follow it, makes for one of the most interesting ideas and developments I have seen anywhere. I like, too, the author's skillful switching from subjective to objective points of view—first to third person—which in less careful hands could have been a disaster. Why then could he not have switched just once more, and, here and there, have given us a native's view of the coming, and passing, and leaving of the city, and from their vantage point, of the distortion phenomena associated with it? When the protagonist Helward escorted the women "down past," why couldn't he let us see what happened to them from the point of view of a resident observer, and what this same observer might have seen as Helward hung, as it were, over the edge of the world? To make sense of these comments, it is of course necessary for you to read the book and I sincerely hope that you do, for in discovering its flaws, you will encounter its virtues, which are many indeed.

I REALLY envy anyone who for the first time encounters the work of Stanley G. Weinbaum. Though speckled with depression-era idioms, his reaching imagination, his inventiveness, his humor and his pathos injected something brand-new and vital into the sf of 1934, as Isaac Asimov in an introduction, and Robert Bloch, in a most moving Afterword, vividly express. To learn that the writing life of this years-ahead-of-his-time author—from the publication of *A Martian Odyssey* in 1934 until his death from cancer—lasted just 17 months, is to know the real taste of regret and a great surge of "if only." By all means get *The Best of*

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Stanley G. Weinbaum (Ballantine, $1.65).

A VERY special note: Anyone who is remotely interested in the many aspects of sf must—I said *must*—be, or get, familiar with *Locus*. If you think it's just another fanzine, think again. It's a bi-monthly newsletter out of San Francisco which covers everything conceivable of interest to the field—book reviews, awards, functions such as conventions and club meetings, addresses of authors and other personalities, and above all, news: news of forthcoming books and the contents of forthcoming magazine issues, of anthologists looking for authors, of film deals and production schedules. Time and again I have known *Locus* to scoop the Hollywood trade press in the area of sf films and TV. My reason for delivering this special plug is the recent shift *Locus* has undergone from mimeo to offset—a huge improvement but one which threatens to kill the paper if it doesn't get more support. It's largely a labor of love, and I don't think the young publishers, Charlie and Dona Brown, have ever wanted much more for it than that it breaks even. You could hardly spend $6.00 more worthily than to send for a subscription. So skip a movie or cook one more dinner at one, and subscribe. Nobody loses. Address *Locus*, Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119.

AND SPEAKING of special things, here's what I call a "peripheral." The industrious William R. Corliss (the same Corliss, by the way, who wrote the book on building a new world through nuclear technology, co-authoring with Glenn Seaborg, *Man and Atom*, from Dutton a few years ago) who wrote the handsome and fascinating *Strange Phenomena* about which I told you a couple of issues ago, has produced another: *Strange Artifacts*, and this has got to be the weirdest sentence I ever structured. (*Indeed. Ed.*) *Strange Artifacts*, like its predecessor, is a good-looking 7"x9" loose-leaf of some 270-plus pages, ingeniously indexed and ready for the smooth inclusion of future data. It's the kind of book you don't dare pick up if you have to be somewhere soon. That it goes heavily into Easter Island and Stonehenge is to be expected, but it goes into many other things, from documents old and new, which I find much more astonishing than either of those. I understand that a second volume of *Strange Phenomena* will be off the press this summer. I'll let you know. They're privately distributed and $6.95 each: write William R. Corliss at P. O. Box 107, Glen Arm, MD 21057.

AND I've chuntered myself out of space again, without getting into my unjustly-brief notices of lots and lots of books. Maybe next time. ★

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I wonder what the vintners buy
one-half so precious as
used polyethylene containers?

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THE GIFT OF GARIGOLLI

FREDERIK POHL and C. M. KORNBLUTH

GARIGOLLI
To Home Base
Greeting, Chief,

I'm glad you're pleased with the demographics and cognitics studies. You don't mention the orbital mapping, but I suppose that's all complete and satisfactory.

Now will you please tell me how we're going to get off this lousy planet?

Keep firmly in mind, Chief, that we're not complainers. You don't have a better crew anywhere in the Galaxy and you know it. We've complied with the Triple Directive, every time, on every planet we've explored. Remember Arcturus XII? But this time we're having trouble. After all, look at the disproportion in mass. And take a look at the reports we've sent in. These are pretty miserable sentients, Chief.

So will you let us know, please, if there has ever been an authorized exception to Directive Two? I don't mean we aren't going to bust a link to comply—if we can—but frankly, at this moment, I don't see how.

And we need to get out of here fast.

Garigolli.

ALTHOUGH it was a pretty morning in June, with the blossoms dropping off the catalpa trees and the algae blooming in the 12-foot plastic pool, I was not enjoying either my breakfast or the morning mail.

The letter from the lawyer started, the way letters from lawyers do, with

RE: GUDSELL VS. DUPOIR

and went on to advise Dupoir (that's me, plus my wife and our two-year-old son Butchie) that unless a certified check arrived in Undersigned's office before close of

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business June 11th (that was tomorrow) in the amount of $14,752.03, Undersigned would be compelled to institute Proceedings at once.

I showed it to my wife, Shirl, for lack of anything better to do.

She read it and nodded intelligently. "He's really been very patient with us, considering," she said. "I suppose this is just some more lawyer-talk?"

It had occurred to me, for a wild moment, that maybe she had $14,752.03 in the old sugar bowl as a surprise for me, but I could see she didn't. I shook my head. "This means they take the house," I said. "I'm not mad any more. But you won't sign anything for your brother after this, will you?"

"Certainly not," she said, shocked. "Shall I put that letter in the paper-recycling bin?"

"Not just yet," I said, taking off my glasses and hearing aid. Shirl knows perfectly well that I can't hear her when my glasses are off, but she kept on talking anyway as she wiped the apricot puree off Butchie's chin, rescued the milk glass, rinsed the plastic infant-food jar and dropped it in the "plastics" carton, rinsed the lid and put it in the "metals" box and poured my coffee. We are a very ecological household. It astonishes me how good Shirl is at things like that, considering.

I waved fruit flies away from the general direction of my orange juice and put my glasses back on in time to catch her asking, wonderingly, "What would they do with our house? I mean, I'm not a demon decorator like Ginevra Freedman. I just like it comfortable and neat."

"They don't exactly want the house," I explained. "They just want the money they'll get after they sell it to somebody else." Her expression cleared at once. Shirl always likes to understand things.

I sipped my coffee, fending off Butchie's attempt to grab the cup, and folded the letter and laid it across my knees like an unsheathed scimitar, ready to taste the blood of the *giaour*, which it kind of was. Butchie indicated that he would like to eat it, but I didn't see that that would solve the problem. Although I didn't have any better way of solving it, at that.

I finished the orange juice, patted Butchie's head and, against my better judgment, gave Shirl the routine kiss on the nose.

"Well," she said, "I'm glad that's settled. Isn't it nice the way the mail comes first thing in the morning now?"

I said it was very nice and left for the bus but, really, I could have been just as happy if Undersigned's letter had come any old time. The fruit flies were pursuing me all the way down the street. They seemed to think they could get nourishmnent out of me, which suggested that fruit flies were about equal in intelligence to brothers-in-law. It

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was not a surprising thought. I had thought it before.

GARIGOLLI
To Home Base
Chief,

The mobility of this Host is a constant pain in the spermatophore. Now he's gone off on the day-cycle early, and half the crew are still stuck in his domicile. Ultimate Matrix knows how they'll handle it if we don't get back before they run out of group empathy.

You've got no reason to take that tone, Chief. We're doing a good job and you know it. "Directive One: To remain undetected by sentients on planet being explored." A hundred and forty-four p.g., right? They don't have a clue we're here, although I concede that that part is fairly easy, since they are so much bigger than we are. "Directive Three: Subject to Directives One and Two, to make a complete study of geographic, demographic, ecological and cognitic factors and to transmit same to Home Base." You actually complimented us on those! It's only Directive Two that's giving us trouble.

We're still trying, but did it ever occur to you that maybe these people don't *deserve* Directive Two?

Garigolli

I LOPED along the jungle trail to the bus stop, calculating with my razor-sharp mind that the distance from the house was almost exactly 14,752.03 centimeters. As centimeters it didn't sound bad at all. As money, $14,752.03 was the kind of sum I hadn't written down since Commercial Arithmetic in P.S. 98.

I fell in with Barney Freedman, insurance underwriter and husband of Ginevra, the Demon Decorator. "Whatever became of Commercial Arithmetic?" I asked him. "Like ninety-day notes for fourteen thousand seven hundred and fifty-two dollars and three cents at six per cent simple interest? Although why anybody would be dumb enough to lend anybody money for ninety days beats me. If he doesn't have it now, he won't have it in ninety days."

"You're in some kind of trouble."

"Shrewd guess."

"So what did Shirl do now?"

"She co-signed a note for her brother," I said. "When he went into the drying-out sanitarium for the gold treatment. They wouldn't take him on his own credit, for some reason. They must have gold-plated him. He said the note was just a formality, so Shirl didn't bother me with it."

We turned the corner. Barney said, "Ginevra didn't bother me once when the telephone company—"

"So when Shirl's brother got undrunk," I said, "he told her not to worry about it and went to California. He thought he might catch on with the movies."

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"Did he?"

"He didn't even catch cold with the movies. Then they sent us the bill. Fourteen thou—well, they had it all itemized. Three nurses. Medication. Suite. Occupational Therapy. Professional services. Hydrotherapy. Group counseling. One-to-one counseling. Limousine. Chauffeur for limousine. Chauffeur's helper for limousine. Chauffeur's helper's hard-boiled eggs for lunch. Salt for chauffeur's helper's hard-boiled—"

"You're getting hysterical," Barney said. "You mean he just skipped?" We were at the bus stop, with a gaggle of other prosperous young suburbanites.

I said, "Like a flat rock on a pond. So we wrote him, and of course the letters came back. They didn't fool around, the 'Institute for Psychosomatic Adjustment didn't."

"That's a pretty name."

"I telephoned a man up there to explain, when we got the first letter. He didn't sound pretty. Just tired. He said my wife shouldn't sign things without reading them. And he said if his house was—something about joint tenancy in fee simple, he would break his wife's arm if she was the type that signed things without reading them, and keep on rebreaking it until she stopped. Meanwhile they had laid out a lot of goods and services in good faith, and what was I going to do about it?"

The bus appeared on the horizon, emitting jet trails of Diesel smog. We knotted up by the sign. "So I told him I didn't know," I said, "but I know now. I'll get sued, that's what I'll do. The Dupoirs always have an answer to every problem."

Conversation was suspended for fifteen seconds of scrimmage while we entered the bus. Barney and I were lucky. We wound up with our heads jammed affectionately together, not too far from a window that sucked in Diesel fumes and fanned them at us. I could see the fruit flies gamely trying to get back to my ear, but they were losing the battle.

Barney said, "Hey. Couldn't you sell your house to somebody you trusted for a dollar, and then they couldn't—"

"Yes, they could. And then we'd both go to jail. I asked a guy in our legal department."

"Huh." The bus roared on, past knots of other prosperous young suburbanites who waved their fists at us as we passed. "How about this. I hope you won't take this the wrong way. But couldn't there be some angle about Shirl being, uh, not exactly *competent* to sign any kind of—"

"I asked about that too, Barney. No hope. Shirl's never been hospitalized, she's never been to a shrink, she runs a house and a husband and a small boy just fine. Maybe she's a little impulsive. But

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a lot of people are impulsive, the man said."

GARIGOLLI

To Home Base

Chief,

I think we've got it. These people use a medium of exchange, remember? And the Host doesn't have enough of it! What could be simpler?

With a little modification there are a couple of local organisms that should be able to concentrate the stuff out of the ambient environment, and then—

And then we're off the impaling spike!

Garigolli.

THE bus jerked to a stop at the railroad station and we boiled out on successive rollers of humanity which beached us at separate parts of the platform.

The 8:07 slid in at 8:19 sharp and I swung aboard, my mighty thews rippling like those of the giant anthropoids among whom I had been raised. With stealthy tread and every jungle-trained sense alert I stalked a vacant seat halfway down the aisle on the left, my fangs and molars bared, my liana-bound, flint-tipped *Times* poised for the thrust of death. It wasn't my morning. Ug-Fwa the Hyena, scavenger of the mighty Limpopo, bounded from the far vestibule giving voice to his mad cackle and

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slipped into the vacant seat. I and the rest of the giant anthropoids glared, unfolded our newspapers and pretended to read.

The headlines were very interesting that morning. PRES ASKS $14,752.03 FOR MISSILE DEFENSE. "SLICK" DUPOIR SOUGHT IN DEFAULT CASE. RUMOR RED PURGE OF BROTHER IN LAW. QUAKE DEATH TOLL SET AT 14,752.03. BODY OF SKID ROW CHARACTER IDENTIFIED AS FORMER PROSPEROUS YOUNG SUBURBANITE; BROTHER IN LAWS FLIES FROM COAST, WEEPS "WHY DIDN'T HE ASK ME FOR HELP?" FOSTER PARENTS OF "BUTCHIE" DUPOIR OPEN LEGAL FIGHT AGAINST DESTITUTE MA AND PA, SAY "IF THEY LOVE HIM WHY DON'T THEY SUPPORT HIM?" GLIDER SOARS 14,752.03 MILES. DUPOIR OFF 147.52—no, that was a fly speck, not a decimal point—OFF 14,752.03 FOR NEW LOW, RAILS AND BROTHERS AND LAW MIXED IN ACTIVE TRADING. I always feel you're more efficient if you start the day with the gist of the news straight in your mind.

I arrived at the office punctually at 9:07, late enough to show that I was an executive, but not so late that Mr. Horgan would notice it. The frowning brow of my cave opened under the grim rock front that bore the legend "International Plastics Co." and I walked in, nodding good morning to several persons from the Fourteenth Floor, but being nodded to myself only by Hermie, who ran the cigar stand. Hermie cultivated my company because I was good for a dollar on the numbers two or three times a week. Little did he know that it would be many a long day before he saw a dollar of mine, perhaps as many as 14,752.03 of them.

GARIGOLLI

To Home Base

Further to my last communication, Chief,

We ran into a kind of a setback. We found a suitable organic substrate and implanted a colony of modified organisms which extracted gold from environmental sources, and they were performing beautifully, depositing a film of pure metal on the substrate, which the Host was carrying with him.

Then he folded it up and threw it in a waste receptacle.

We're still working on it, but I don't know, Chief, I don't know.

Garigolli.

I FIND IT a little difficult to explain to people what I do for a living. It has something to do with making the country plastics-conscious. I make the country plastics-conscious by writing newspaper stories about plastics which only seem to get printed in neighborhood shopping guides in Sioux

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Falls, Idaho. And by scripting talk features about plastics which get run from 11:55 PM to 12:00 midnight on radio stations the rest of whose programs time is devoted to public-service items like late jockey changes at Wheeling Downs. And by scripting television features which do not seem ever to be run on any station. And by handling the annual Miss Plastics contest, at least up to the point where actual contestants appear, when it is taken over by the people from the Fourteenth Floor. And by writing the monthly page of Plastics Briefs which goes out, already matted, to 2,000 papers in North America. Plastics Briefs is our best bet because each Brief is illustrated by a line drawing of a girl doing something with, to or about plastics, and her costume is always brief. As I said, all this is not easy to explain, so when people ask me what I do I usually say, "Whatever Mr. Horgan tells me to."

This morning Mr. Horgan called me away from a conference with Jack Denny, our Briefs artist, and said: "Dupoir, that Century of Plastics Anniversary Dinner idea of yours is out. The Fourteenth Floor says it lacks thematic juice. Think of something else for a winter promotion, and think big!" He banged a plastic block on his desk with a little plastic hammer.

I said, "Mr. Horgan, how about this? Are we getting the break in the high-school chemistry text-

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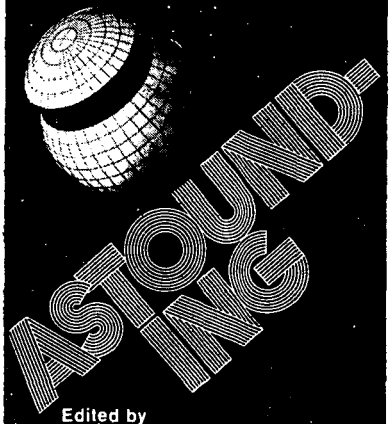

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books we should? Are we getting the message of polythene to every boy, girl, brother in law—"

He shook his head. "That's small," he said, and went on to explain: "By which I mean it isn't big. Also there is the flak we are getting from the nature nuts, which the Fourteenth Floor does not think you are dealing with in a creative way."

"I've ordered five thousand pop-up recycling bins for the test, Mr. Horgan. They're not only plastic, they're *recycled* plastic. We use them in my own home, and I am confident—"

"Confidence," he said, "is when you've got your eyes so firmly fixed on the goal that you trip on a dog-doodie and fall in the crap."

I regrouped. "I think we can convert the present opposition from the ecology movement to—"

"The ecology movement," he said, "is people who love buzzards better than babies and catfish better than cars."

I fell back on my last line of defense. "Yes, Mr. Horgan," I said.

"Personally," Mr. Horgan said, "I *like* seeing plastic bottles bobbing in the surf. It makes me feel, I don't know, like part of something that is going to last forever. I want you to communicate that feeling, Dupoir. Now go get your Briefs out."

I thought of asking for a salary advance of $14,752.03, but hesitated.

"Is there something else?"

"No, Mr. Horgan. Thank you." I left quietly.

Jack Denny was still waiting in my office, doodling still-life studies of cornucopias with fruits and nuts spilling out of them. "Look," he said, "how about this for a change? Something symbolic of the season, like 'the rich harvest of Plastics to make life more gracious,' like?"

I said kindly, "You don't understand copy, Jack. Do you remember what we did for last September?"

He scowled. "A girl in halter and shorts, very brief and tight, putting up plastic storm windows."

"That's right. Well, I've got an idea for something kind of novel this year. A little two-act drama. Act One: She's wearing halter and shorts and she's taking down the plastic screens. Act Two: She's wearing a dress and putting up the plastic storm windows. And this is important. In Act Two there's wind, and autumn leaves blowing, and the dress is kind of wind-blown tight against her. Do you know what I mean, Jack?"

He said evenly, "I was the youngest child and only boy in a family of eight. If I didn't know what you meant by now I would deserve to be put away. Sometimes I think I *will* be put away. Do you know what seven older sisters can do to the psychology of a sensitive young boy?" He began to shake.

"Draw, Jack," I told him hastily. To give him a chance to recover

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himself I picked up his cornucopias. "Very nice," I said, turning them over. "Beautiful modeling. I guess you spilled some paint on this one?"

He snatched it out of my hand. "Where? That? That's gilt. I don't even have any gilt."

"No offense, Jack. I just thought it looked kind of nice." It didn't, particularly, it was just a shiny yellow smear in a corner of the drawing.

"Nice! Sure, if you'd let me use metallic inks. If you'd go to high-gloss paper. If you'd *spend* a few bucks—"

"Maybe, Jack," I said, "it'd be better, at that, if you took these back to your office. You can concentrate better there, maybe."

He went out, shaking.

I stayed in and thought about my house and brother in law and the Gudsell Medical Credit Bureau and after a while I began to shake too. Shaking, I phoned a Mr. Klaw, whom I had come to think of as my "account executive" at Gudsell.

Mr. Klaw was glad to hear from me. "You got our lawyer's note? Good, good. And exactly what arrangements are you suggesting, Mr. Dupoir?"

"I don't know," I said openly. "It catches me at a bad time. If we could have an extension—"

"Extensions we haven't got," he said regretfully. "We had one month of extensions, and we gave you the month, and now we're fresh out. I'm really sorry, Dupoir."

"With some time I could get a second mortgage, Mr. Klaw."

"You could at that, but not for $14,752.03."

"Do you want to put me and my family on the street?"

"Goodness, no, Mr. Dupoir! What we want is the sanitarium's money, including our commission. And maybe we want a *little* bit to make people think before they sign things, and maybe that people who should go to the county hospital *go* to the county hospital instead of a frankly de luxe rest home."

"I'll call you later," I said.

"Please do," said Mr. Klaw sincerely.

Tendons slack as the limp lianas, I leafed listlessly through the *dhowani-bark* jujus on my desk, studying Jack Denny's draftsmanship with cornucopias. The yellow stain, I noted, seemed to be spreading, even as a brother in law's blood might spread on the sands of the doom-pit when the cobras hissed the hour of judgment.

Mr. Horgan rapped perfunctorily on the doorframe and came in. "I had the impression, Dupoir, that you had something further to ask me at our conference this morning. I've learned to back those judgments, Dupoir."

"Well, sir—" I began.

"Had that feeling about poor old Globus," he went on. "You remember Miss Globus? Crying in the file room one day. Seems she'd

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signed up for some kind of charm school. Couldn't pay, didn't like it, tried to back out. They wanted their money. Attached her wages. Well. Naturally, we couldn't have that sort of financial irresponsibility. I understand she's a PFC in the WAC now. What was it you wanted, Dupoir?"

"Me, Mr. Horgan? Wanted? No. Nothing at all."

"Glad we cleared that up," he grunted. "Can't do your best work for the firm if your mind's taken up with personal problems. Remember, Dupoir. We want the country plastics conscious, and forget about those ecology freaks."

"Yes, Mr. Horgan."

"And big. Not small."

"Big it is, Mr. Horgan," I said. I rolled up Jack Denny's sketches into a thick wad and threw them at him in the door, but not before he had closed it behind him.

GARIGOLLI

To Home Base

Listen Chief,

I appreciate your trying to work out a solution for us, but you're not doing as well as we're doing, even. Not that that's much.

We tried again to meet that constant aura of medium-of-exchange need from the Host, but he destroyed the whole lash-up again. Maybe we're misunderstanding him?

Artifacts are out. He's too big to see anything we make. Energy sources don't look promising. Oh, sure, we could elaborate lesser breeds that would selectively concentrate, for instance, plutonium or one of the uraniums. I don't think this particular Host would know the difference unless the scale was very large, and then, blooie, critical mass.

Meanwhile morale is becoming troublesome. We're holding together, but I wouldn't describe the condition as *good.* Vellitot has been wooing Dinnoliss in spite of the secondary directives against breeding while on exploration missions. I've cautioned them both, but they don't seem to stop. The funny thing is they're both in the male phase.

Garigolli.

BETWEEN Jack Denny and myself we got about half of the month's Plastics Briefs before quitting time. Maybe they weren't big, but they were real wind-blown. All factors considered, I don't think it is very much to my discredit that two hours later I was moodily drinking my seventh beer in a dark place near the railroad station.

The bartender respected my mood, the TV was off, the juke box had nothing but blues on it and there was only one fly in my lugubrious ointment, a little man who kept trying to be friendly.

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From time to time I gave him a scowl I had copied from Mr. Horgan. Then he would edge down the bar for a few minutes before edging back. Eventually he got up courage enough to talk, and I got too gloomy to crush him with my mighty thews, corded like the jungle-vines that looped from the towering *nganga*-palms.

He was some kind of hotelkeeper, it appeared. "My young friend, you may think you have problems, but there's no business like my business. Mortgage, insurance, state supervision, building and grounds maintenance, kitchen personnel and purchasing, linen, uniforms, the station wagon and the driver, carpet repairs—oh, God, carpet repairs! No matter how many ash trays you put around, you know what they do? They steal the ashtrays. Then they stamp out cigarettes on the carpets." He began to weep.

I told the bartender to give him another. How could I lose? If he passed out I'd be rid of him. If he recovered I would have his undying, doglike affection for several minutes, and what kind of shape was I in to sneer at that?

Besides, I had worked out some pretty interesting figures. "Did you know," I told him, "that if you spend $1.46 a day on cigarettes, you can save $14,752.03 by giving up smoking for 10,104 and a quarter days?"

He wasn't listening, but he wasn't weeping any more either. He was just looking lovingly at his vodka libre, or whatever it was. I tried a different tack. "When you see discarded plastic bottles bobbing in the surf," I asked, "does it make you feel like part of something grand and timeless that will go on forever?"

He glanced at me with distaste, then went back to adoring his drink. "Or do you like buzzards better than babies?" I asked.

"They're all babies," he said. "Nasty, smelly, upchucking babies."

"Who are?" I asked, having lost the thread. He shook his head mysteriously, patted his drink and tossed it down.

"Root of most evil," he said, swallowing. Then, affectionately, "Don't know where I'd be with it, don't know where I'd be without it."

He appeared to be talking about booze. "On your way home, without it?" I suggested.

He said obscurely, "Digging ditches, without it." Then he giggled. "Greatest business in the world! But oh! the worries! The competition! And when you come down to it it's all just aversion, right?"

"I can see you have a great aversion to liquor," I said politely.

"No, stupid! The *guests*."

Stiffly I signaled for Number Eight, but the bartender misunderstood and brought another for my

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friend, too. I said, "You have an aversion to the guests?"

He took firm hold on the bar and attempted to look squarely into my eyes, but wound up with his left eye four inches in front of my left eye and both our right eyes staring at respective ears. "The *guests* must be made to feel an aversion to *alcohol*," he said. "Secret of the whole thing. Works. Sometimes. But oh! it costs."

Like the striking fangs of Nag, the cobra, faster than the eye can follow, my trained reflexes swept the beer up to my lips. I drank furiously, scowling at him. "You mean to say you ran a drunk farm?" I shouted.

He was shocked. "My boy! No need to be fulgar. An 'institute', eh? Let's leave the aversion to the drunks."

"I have to tell you, sir," I declared, "that I have a personal reason for despising all proprietors of such institutions!"

He began to weep again. "You, too! Oh, the general scorn."

"In my case, there is nothing general—"

"—the hatred! The unthinking contempt. And for what?"

I snarled, "For your blood-sucking ways."

"Blood, old boy?" he said, surprised. "No, nothing like that. We don't use blood. We use gold, yes, but the gold cure's old hat. Need new gimmick. Can't use silver, too cheap. Really doesn't matter what you say you use. All aversion—drying them out, keeping them comfy and aversion. But no blood."

He wiggled his fingers for Number Nine. Moodily I drank, glaring at him over my glass.

"In the wrong end of it, I sometimes think," he went on meditatively, staring with suspicious envy at the bartender. "*He* doesn't have to worry. Pour it out, pick up the money. No concern about expensive rooms standing idle, staff loafing around picking their noses, overhead going on, going on—you wouldn't b*elieve* how it goes on, whether the guests are there to pay for it or not—"

"Hah," I muttered.

"You've simply no idea what I go through," he sobbed. "And then they won't pay. No, really. Fellow beat me out of $14,752.03 just lately. I'm taking it out of the co-signer's hide, of course, but after you pay the collection agency, what's the profit?"

I choked on the beer, but he was too deep in sorrow to notice.

Strangling, I gasped, "Did you say fourteen thousand—?"

He nodded. "Seven hundred and fifty-two dollars, yes. And three cents. Astonishes you, doesn't it, the deadbeats in this world?"

I couldn't speak.

"You wouldn't think it," he mourned. "All those salaries. All those rooms. The hydrotherapy tubs. The *water* bill."

I shook my head.

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"Probably you think my life's bowl of roses, hey?"

I managed to pry my larynx open enough to wheeze, "Up to this minute, yes, I did. You've opened my eyes."

"Drink to that," he said promptly. "Hey, barman!"

But before the bartender got there with Number Ten the little man hiccoughed and slid melting to the floor, like a glacier calving into icebergs.

The bartender peered over at him. "Every *damn* night," he grumbled. "And who's going to get him home this time?"

My mind working as fast as *Ngo*, the dancing spider, spinning her web, I succeeded in saying, "Me. Glad to oblige. Never fear."

GARIGOLLI

To Home Base

Chief,

All right, I admit we haven't been exactly 144 p.g. on this project, but there's no reason for you to get loose. Reciting the penalties for violating the Triple Directive is uncalled-for.

Let me point out that there has been no question at any time of compliance with One or Three. And even Directive Two, well, we've done what we could. "To repay sentients in medium suitable to them for information gained." These sentients are tricky, Chief. They don't seem to empathize, really. See our reports. They often take without giving in return among themselves, and it seems to me that under the circumstances a certain modification of Directive Two would have been quite proper.

But I am not protesting the ruling. Especially since you've pointed out it won't do any good. When I get old and skinny enough to retire to a sling in Home Base I guess I'll get that home-base mentality too, but way out here on the surface of the exploration volume it looks different, believe me.

And what is happening with the rest of our crew back at Host's domicile I can't even guess. They must be nearly frantic by now.

Garigolli.

THERE was some discussion with a policeman he wanted to hit (apparently under the impression that the cop was his night watchman playing hookey), but I finally got the little man to the Institute for Psychosomatic Adjustment.

The mausoleum that had graduated my brother in law turned out to be three stories high, with a sun porch and a slate roof and bars on the ground-floor bay windows. It was not all that far from my house. Shirl had been pleased about that, I remembered. She said we could visit her brother a lot there, and in fact she had gone over once or twice

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on Sundays, but me, I'd never set eyes on the place before.

Dagger-sharp fangs flecking white spume, none dared dispute me as I strode through the great green corridors of the rain forest. Corded thews rippling like pythons under my skin, it was child's play to carry the craven jackal to his lair. The cabbie helped me up the steps with him.

The little man, now revealed as that creature who in anticipation had seemed so much larger and hairier, revived slightly as we entered the reception hall. "Ooooh," he groaned. "Watch the bouncing, old boy. That door. My office. Leather couch. Much obliged."

I dumped him on the couch, lit a green-shaded lamp on his desk, closed the door and considered.

Mine enemy had delivered himself into my power. All I had to do was seize him by the forelock. I seemed to see the faces of my family—Shirl's smiling sweetly, Butchie's cocoa-overlaid-with-oatmeal—spurring me on.

There had to be a way.

I pondered. Life had not equipped me for this occasion. Raffles or Professor Moriarity would have known what to do at once, but, ponder as I would, I couldn't think of anything to do except to go through the drawers of his desk.

Well, it was a start. But it yielded very little. Miscellaneous paper clips and sheaves of letterheads, a carton of cigarettes of a brand apparently flavored with rice wine and extract of vanilla, part of a fifth of Old Rathole and five switchblade knives, presumably taken from the inmates. There was also $6.15 in unused postage stamps, but I quickly computed that, even if I went to the trouble of cashing them in, that would leave me $14,745.88 short.

Of Papers to Burn there were none.

All in all, the venture was a bust. I wiped out a water glass with one of the letterheads (difficult, because they were of so high quality that they seemed likelier to shatter than to wad up), and forced down a couple of ounces of the whiskey (difficult, because it was of so low).

Obviously anything of value, like for instance co-signed agreements with brothers in law, would be in a safe, which itself would probably be in the offices of the Gudsell Medical Credit Bureau. Blackmail? But there seemed very little to work with, barring one or two curious photographs tucked in among the envelopes. Conceivably I could cause him some slight embarrassment, but nowhere near $14,752.03 worth. I had not noticed any evidence of Red espionage that might put the little man (whose name, I learned from his letterhead, was Bermingham) away for 10,104 and a quarter days, while I saved up the price of reclaiming our liberty.

There seemed to be only one possible thing to do.

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Eyes glowing like red coals behind slitted lids, I walked lightly on velvet-soft pads to the *kraal* of the witch-man. He was snoring with his mouth open. Totally vulnerable to his doom.

Only, how to inflict it?

It is not as easy as one might think to murder a person. Especially if one doesn't come prepared for it. Mr. Horgan doesn't like us to carry guns at the office, and heaven knows what Shirl would do with one if I left it around home. Anyway, I didn't have one.

Poison was a possibility. The Old Rathole suggested itself. But we'd already tried that, hadn't we?

I considered the switchblade knives. There was a technical problem. Would *you* know where the heart is? Granted, it had to be inside his chest somewhere, and sooner or later I could find it. But what would I say to Mr. Bermingham after the first three or four exploratory stabs woke him up?

The only reasonably efficient method I could think of to insure Mr. Bermingham's decease was to burn the place down with him in it. Which, I quickly perceived, meant with whatever cargo of drying-out drunks the Institute now possessed in it too, behind those barred windows.

At this point I came face to face with myself.

I wasn't going to kill anybody. I wasn't going to steal any papers.

What I was going to do was, I was going to let Mr. Klaw's lawyers go ahead and take our house, because I just didn't know how to do anything else. I hefted the switchblades in my hand, threw them against the wall and poured myself another slug of Mr. Bermingham's lousy whiskey, wishing it would kill me right there and be a lesson to him.

GARIGOLLI

To Home Base

Now, don't get excited, Chief,

But we have another problem.

Before I get into it, I would like to remind you of a couple of things. First, I was against exploring this planet in the first place, remember? I said it was going to be very difficult, on the grounds of the difference in mass between its dominant species and us. I mean, really. Here we are, fighting member to member against dangerous beasts all the time, and the beasts, to the Host and his race, are only microorganisms that live unnoticed in their circulatory systems, their tissues, their food and their environment. Anybody could tell that this was going to be a tough assignment, if not an impossible one.

Then there's the fact that this Host moves around so. I told you some of our crew got left in his domicile. Well, we've timed this

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before, and almost always he returns within 144 or 216 time-units—at most, half of one of his planet's days. It's pretty close to critical, but our crew is tough and they can survive empathy-deprival that long. Only this time he has been away, so far, nearly 432 time-units. It's bad enough for those of us who have been with him. The ones who were cut off back at his domicile must have been through the tortures of the damned.

Two of them homed in on us to report just a few time-units ago, and I'm afraid you're not going to like what's happened. They must have been pretty panicky. They decided to try meeting the Second Directive themselves. They modified some microorganisms to provide some organic chemicals they thought the Host might like.

Unfortunately the organisms turned out to have an appetite for some of the Host's household artifacts, and they're pretty well demolished. So we not only haven't *given* him anything to comply with Directive Two, we've *taken* something from him. And in the process maybe we've called attention to ourselves.

I'm giving it to you arced, Chief, because I know that's how you'd like it. I accept full responsibility.

Because I don't have any choice, do I?

Garigolli.

"WHAT the Hell," said the voice of Mr. Bermingham, from somewhere up there, "are you doing in my office?"

I opened my eyes, and he was quite right. I was in Mr. Bermingham's office. The sun was streaming through Mr. Bermingham's Venetian blinds, and Mr. Bermingham was standing over me with a selection of the switchblade knives in his hands.

I don't know how Everyman reacts to this sort of situation. I guess I ran about average. I pushed myself up on one elbow and blinked at him.

"Spastic," he muttered to himself. "Well?"

I cleared my throat. "I, uh, I think I can explain this."

He was hung over and shaking. "Go ahead! Who the devil are you?"

"Well, my name is Dupoir."

"I don't mean what's your name, I mean— Wait a minute. Dupoir?"

"Dupoir."

"As in $14,752.03?"

"That's right, Mr. Bermingham."

"You!" he gasped. "Say, you've got some nerve coming here this way. I ought to teach you a lesson."

I scrambled to my feet. Mighty thews rippling, I tossed back my head and bellowed the death-challenge of the giant anthropoids with whom I had been raised.

Bermingham misunderstood. It probably didn't sound like a death-

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challenge to him. He said anxiously, "If you're going to be sick, go in there and do it. Then we're going to straighten this thing out."

I followed his pointing finger. There on one side of the foyer was the door marked *Staff Washroom,* and on the other the door to the street through which I had carried him. It was only the work of a second to decide which to take. I was out the door, down the steps, around the corner and hailing a fortuitious cab before he could react.

By the time I got to the house that Mr. Klaw wanted so badly to take away from us it was 7:40 on my watch. There was no chance at all that Shirl would still be asleep. There was not any very big chance that she had got to sleep at all that night, not with her faithful husband for the first time in the four years of our marriage staying out all night without warning, but no chance at all that she would be still in bed. So there would be explaining to do. Nevertheless I insinuated my key into the lock of the back door, eased it open, slipped ghostlike through and gently closed it behind me.

I smelled like a distillery, I noticed, but my keen, jungle-trained senses brought me no other message. No one was in sight or sound. Not even Butchie was either chattering or weeping to disturb the silence.

I slid silently through the mudroom into the half-bath where I kept a spare razor. I spent five minutes trying to convert myself into the image of a prosperous young executive getting ready to be half an hour late at work, but it was no easy job. There was nothing but soap to shave with, and Butchie had knocked it into the sink. What was left was a blob of jelly, sculpted into a crescent where the dripping tap had eroded it away. Still, I got clean, more or less, and shaved, less.

I entered the kitchen, and then realized that my jungle-trained senses had failed to note the presence of a pot of fresh coffee perking on the stove. I could hear it plainly enough. Smelling it was more difficult; its scent was drowned by the aroma of cheap booze that hung in the air all around me.

So I turned around and yes, there was Shirl on the stairway, holding Butchie by one hand like Maureen O'Sullivan walking Cheeta. She wore an expression of unrelieved tragedy.

It was clearly necessary to give her an explanation at once, whether I had one or not. "Honey," I said, "I'm *sorry.* I met this fellow I hadn't seen in a long time, and we got to talking. I know we should have called. But by the time I realized the time it was so late I was afraid I'd wake you up."

"You can't wear that shirt to the office," she said woefully. "I ironed your blue and gray one with the

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white cuffs. It's in the closet."

I paused to analyze the situation. It appeared she wasn't angry at all, only upset—which, as any husband of our years knows, is 14,752.03 times worse. In spite of the fact that the reek of booze was making me giddy and fruit flies were buzzing around Shirl's normally immaculate kitchen, I knew what I had to do. "Shirl," I said, falling to one knee, "I apologize."

That seemed to divert her. "Apologize? For what?"

"For staying out all night."

"But you explained all that. You met this fellow you hadn't seen in a long time, and you got to talking. By the time you realized the time it was so late you were afraid you'd wake me up."

"Oh, Shirl," I cried, leaping to my feet and crushing her in my mighty thews. I would have kissed her, but the reek of stale liquor seemed even stronger. I was afraid of what close contact might do, not to mention its effect on Butchie, staring up at me with a thumb and two fingers in his mouth. We Dupoirs never do anything by halves.

But there was a tear in her eye. She said, "I watched Butchie, honestly I did. I always do. When he broke the studio lamp I was watching every minute, remember? He was just too fast for me."

I didn't have any idea what she was talking about. That is not an unfamiliar situation in our house, and I have developed a technique for dealing with it. "What?" I asked.

"He was too fast for me," Shirl said woefully. "When he dumped his vitamins into his raisins and oatmeal I was right there. I went to get some paper napkins, and that was when he did it. But how could I know it would ruin the plastics bin?"

I went into Phase Two. "What plastics bin?"

"*Our* plastics bin." She pointed. "Where Butchie threw the stuff."

At once I saw what she meant. There was a row of four plastic popup recycling bins in our kitchen, one for paper, one for plastics, one for glass and one for metals. They were a credit to us, and to Mr. Horgan and to the Fourteenth Floor. However, the one marked "plastics" was not a credit to anyone any more. It had sprung a leak. A colorless fluid was oozing out of the bottom of it and, whatever it was, it was deeply pitting the floor tiles.

I bent closer and realized where the reek of stale booze was coming from: out of the juices that were seeping from our plastics bin.

"What the devil?" I asked.

Shirl said thoughtfully, "If vitamins can do that to plastic, what do you suppose they do to Butchie's insides?"

"It isn't the vitamins. I know that much." I reached in and hooked the handle of what had been a

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milk jug, gallon size. It was high-density polythene and about four hundred per cent more indestructible than Mount Rushmore. It was exactly the kind of plastic jug that people who loved buzzards better than babies have been complaining about finding bobbing around the surf of their favorite bathing beaches, all the world over.

Indestructible or not, it was about ninty per cent destroyed. What I pulled out was a handle and part of a neck. The rest drizzled off into a substance very like the stuff I had shaved with. Only that was soap, which one expects to dissolve from time to time. High-density polythene one does not.

The fruit flies were buzzing around me, and everything was very confusing. I was hardly aware that the front doorbell had rung until I noticed that Shirl had gone to answer it.

What made me fully aware of this was Mr. Bermingham's triumphant roar: "Thought I'd find you here, Dupoir! And who are these people—your confederates?"

Bermingham had no terrors for me. I was past that point. I said, "Hello, Mr. Bermingham. This confederate is my wife, the littler one here is my son. Shirl, Butchie—Mr. Bermingham. Mr. Bermingham's the one who is going to take away our house."

Shirl said politely, "You must be tired, Mr. Bermingham. I'll get you a cup of coffee."

GARIGOLLI to Home Base

Chief,

I admit it, we've excreted this one out beyond redemption. Don't bother to reply to this. Just write us off.

I could say that it wasn't entirely the fault of the crew members who stayed behind in the Host's domicile. They thought they had figured out a way to meet Directive Two. They modified some organisms—didn't even use bacteria, just an enzyme that hydrated polythene into what they had every reason to believe was a standard food substance, since the Host had been observed to ingest it with some frequency. There is no wrong-doing there, Chief. Alcohols are standard foods for many organic beings, as you know. And a gift of food has been held to satisfy the second Directive. And add to that they they were half out of their plexuses with empathy deprivation.

Nevertheless I admit the gift failed in a fairly basic way, since it seems to have damaged artifacts the Hosts hold valuable.

So I accept the responsibility, Chief, Wipe this expedition off the records. We've failed, and we'll never see our home breeding-slings again.

Please notify our descendants and former co-parents and, if you can, try to let them

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think we died heroically, won't you?

Garigolli.

SHIRL has defeated the wrath of far more complex creatures than Mr. Bermingham by offering them coffee—me, for instance. While she got him the clean cup and the spoon and the milk out of the pitcher in the refrigerator, I had time to think.

Mr. Horgan would be interested in what had happened to our plastics eco-bin. Not only Mr. Horgan. The Fourteenth Floor would be interested. The ecology freaks themselves would be interested, and maybe would forget about liking buzzards better than babies long enough to say a good word for International Plastics Co.

I mean, this was *significant.* It was big, by which I mean it wasn't little. It was a sort of whole new horizon for plastics. The thing about plastics, as everyone knows, is that once you convert them into trash they *stay* trash. Bury a maple syrup jug in your back yard and five thousand years from now some descendant operating a radar-controlled peony-planter from his back porch will grub it up as shiny as new. But the gunk in our eco-bin was making these plastics, or at least the polythene parts of them, bio-degradable.

What was the gunk? I had no idea. Some random chemical combination between Butchie's oatmeal and his vitamins? I didn't care. It was there, and it worked. If we could isolate the stuff, I had no doubt that the world-famous scientists who gave us the plastic storm window and the popup eco-bin could duplicate it. And if we could duplicate it we could sell it to hard-pressed garbagemen all over the world. The Fourteenth Floor would be very pleased.

With me to think was ever to act. I rinsed out one of Butchie's baby-food jars in the sink, scraped some of the stickiest parts of the melting plastic into it and capped it tightly. I couldn't wait to get it to the office.

Mr. Bermingham was staring at me with his mouth open. "Good Lord," he muttered, "playing with filth at his age. What psychic damage we wreak with bad early toilet-training."

I had lost interest in Mr. Bermingham. I stood up and told him, "I've got to go to work. I'd be happy to walk you as far as the bus."

"You aren't going anywhere, Dupoir! Came here to talk to you. Going to do it, too. Behavior was absolutely inexcusable, and I demand— Say, Dupoir, you don't have a drink anywhere about the house, do you?"

"More coffee, Mr. Bermingham?" Shirl said politely. "I'm afraid we don't have anything stronger to offer you. We don't keep alcoholic beverages here, or at

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least not very long. Mr. Dupoir drinks them."

"Thought so," snarled Bermingham. "Recognize a drunk when I see one: shifty eyes, irrational behavior, duplicity—oh, the duplicity! Got all the signs."

"Oh, he's not like my brother, really," Shirl said thoughtfully. "My husband doesn't go out breaking into liquor stores when he runs out, you know. But I don't drink, and Butchie doesn't drink, and so about all we ever have in the house is some cans of beer, and there aren't any of those now."

Bermingham looked at her with angry disbelief. "You too! I *smell* it," he said. "You going to tell me I don't know what good old ethyl alcohol smells like?"

"That's the bin, Mr. Bermingham. It's a terrible mess, I know."

"Funny place to keep the creature," he muttered to himself, dropping to his knees. He dipped a finger into the drippings, smelled it, tasted it and nodded. "Alcohol, all right. Add a few congeners, couple drops of food coloring, and you've got the finest Chivas Regal a bellboy ever sold you out of a bottle with the tax stamp broken." He stood up and glared at me. "What's the matter with you, Dupoir? You not only don't pay your honest debts, you don't want to pay the bartenders either?"

I said, "It's more or less an accident."

"Accident?"

Then illumination struck. "Accident you should find us like this," I corrected. "You see, it's a secret new process. We're not ready to announce it yet. Making alcohol out of old plastic scraps."

He questioned Shirl with his eyes. Getting her consent, he poured some of Butchie's baby-food orange juice into a glass, scooped in some of the drippings from the bin, closed his eyes and tasted. "Mmm," he said judiciously. "Sell it for vodka just the way it stands."

"Glad to have an expert opinion," I said. "We think there's millions in it."

He took another taste. "Plastic scraps, you say? Listen, Dupoir. Think we can clear all this up in no time. That fool Klaw, I've told him over and over, ask politely, don't make trouble for people. But no, he's got that crazy lawyer's drive for revenge. Apologize for him, old boy, I really do apologize for him. Now look," he said, putting down the glass to rub his hands. "You'll need help in putting this process on the market. Business acumen, you know? Wise counsel from man of experience. Like me. And capital. Can help you there. I'm loaded."

Shirl put in, "Then what do you want our house for?"

"House? My dear Mrs. Dupoir," cried Mr. Bermingham, laughing heartily, "I'm not going to take your house! Your husband and I will work out the details in no time. Let me have a little more of that de-

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lightful orange juice and we can talk some business."

GARIGOLLI
to Home Base
Joy, joy Chief!

Cancel all I said. We've met Directive Two, the Host is happy, and we're on our way Home!

Warm up the breeding slings, there's going to be a hot time in the old hammocks tonight.

Garigolli.

STRAIGHT as the flight of Ung-Glitch, the soaring vulture, that is the code of the jungle. I was straight with Mr. Bermingham. I didn't cheat him. I made a handshake deal with him over the ruins of our Eco-Bin, and honored it when we got to his lawyers. I traded him 40% of the beverage rights to the stuff that came out of our bin, and he wrote off that little matter of $14,752.03.

Of course, the beverage rights turned out not to be worth all that much, because the stuff in the bin was organic and alive and capable of reproduction, and it did indeed reproduce itself enthusiastically. Six months later you could buy a starter drop of it for a quarter on any street corner, and what that has done to the vintners of the world you know as well as I do. But Bermingham came out ahead. He divided his 40% interest into forty parts and sold them for $500 each to the alumni of his drunk tank. And Mr. Horgan—

Ah, Mr. Horgan.

Mr. Horgan was perched on my doorframe like Ung-Glitch awaiting a delivery of cadavers for dinner when I arrived that morning, bearing my little glass jar before me like the waiting line in an obstetrician's office. "You're late, Dupoir," he pointed out. "Troubles me, that does. Do you remember Metcalf? Tall, blonde girl that used to work in Accounts Receivable? Never could get in on time, and—"

"Mr. Horgan," I said, "look." And I unscrewed my baby-food jar and dumped the contents on an unpopped pop-up Eco-Bin. It took him a while to see what was happening, but once he saw he was so impressed he forgot to roar.

And, yes, the Fourteenth Floor was very pleased.

There wasn't any big money in it. We couldn't sell the stuff, because it was so happy to give itself away to everyone in the world. But it meant a promotion and a raise. Not big. But not really little, either. And, as Mr. Horgan said, "I *like* the idea of helping to eliminate all the litter that devastates the landscape. It makes me feel, I don't know, like part of something clean and natural."

And so we got along happily as anything—happily, anyway, until the time Shirl bought the merry-go-round. ★

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A STEP FARTHER OUT

JERRY POURNELLE, Ph.D.

SCIENCE FACT

OUR FRIENDS THE ARABS

EDITOR Jim Baen tells me he's on balance a political liberal. (*That is* Jerry's *interpretation. I prefer to call myself a Constructive Anarchist. I trust I make myself sufficiently obscure.*) It's generally said that my views are conservative. Jim and I undoubtedly would disagree if we talked politics, which we haven't; but we agree on the significance of the Arab oil boycott.

It was one of the best things that happened to the United States in the last 20 years.

No, this isn't going to be a long editorial, but it seemed reasonable to get the editorial view out in the open before I start the column proper.

The first favor the Arabs did us was to make the entire nation energy-conscious. Until the boycott, only a few scientists, and scattered conservation organizations, were at all concerned about the energy problem.

In 1971 I wrote a series of columns and one major newspaper article about the coming energy crisis. The President's energy message that summer contained several sentences (with crediting the source) from those. "The government" had plenty of figures, and officials were highly concerned, but their energy bills sat in Congressional committees. The Congress is the most democratic of our branches of government, and until the public worries, Congress does not.

The average American didn't—and doesn't now—understand the energy problem. Until he had to wait in line for gasoline, it wasn't his business. All that changed a few months ago, and even though the boycott has been lifted, we'll never go back where we were this time last year, if for no other reason than the price of operating an automobile will keep energy costs ever before us.

It has become fashionable to conserve energy. People turn off lights, ride bicycles, form carpools. Speed limits have been lowered. Suddenly it is not only expensive, but downright immoral, to waste energy.

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This is all to the good. The more we conserve, the less we'll have to find; and besides, it *is* immoral to waste a resource that took millions of years to form and which our grandchildren may need desperately. Energy conservation is a Good Thing, and we can thank the Arabs for not only reminding us of our duty, but making it expensive to shirk it.

CONSERVATION, however, isn't going to save us from another energy crisis. We can talk until we're blue in the face about using less energy, and we can turn out lights, and recycle steel (although recycling many resources uses more energy than finding new ones), and ride bicycles, and do without electric carving knives and toothbrushes, and when we're finished we might be able to cut the annual growth rate of energy consumption in half. This is a real saving, but it's not the Earth.

The reason we'll continue to use more energy every year for a long time to come is that we live in a democracy, and there is not one sane politician who wants to run on a platform of "increased work for less pay". We can philosophize and educate and pontificate all we choose, but the American worker expects more money for less work as he expects winter to follow summer; and the only way to go from labor-intensive industry to something else is for the something else to be energy-intensive industry.

In order to talk intelligently about energy conservation, let's see just where our energy goes. Table One gives the percentages for 1967, a good typical year and about the last one for which the figures are readily available.

TABLE ONE
ENERGY CONSUMPTION IN THE UNITED STATES (1967) (%)

Consumer	Use: Space heating	Use: Other heating	Use: Electricity	Use: Motive power	Use: Other	Total
Residential	12	4	5			20
Commercial	3	4	3			10
Transport'tn	1			20		21
Industry	3	20	10		4	37
Other	1	6	3		7	17
TOTAL	18	33	20	20	11	

(Does not add to 100% due to rounding)

Now those are fairly interesting figures. For one thing, they show that if we turned out *all* the lights in our houses and kept them off, never used home air conditioners, unplugged the refrigerators, and I learned to type on a manual again, we could save about 5% of the total energy needed each year. If we smashed all the neon lights and made all the shops do without electricity, we could save 3% more, for a grand total of 8%.

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In practical terms, that would mean, at present requirement growth rates, that for two to four years we wouldn't have to build any new power plants. Somehow it doesn't seem worth it.

On the other hand, gasoline saving is worthwhile; we're working on the second largest item in the budget. The largest item, industry, pretty well takes care of itself, as fuel costs go up, industry will take drastic conservation steps simply from the profit motive. The only way we'll cut much into industry's share is by closing some industries altogether as frivolous—and everyone, strangely enough, seems to think the other guy's job is frivolous and a good place to start. He never wants to eliminate his own.

Another good area for saving is residential space heating. It's over 10% of the total, after all. But since we don't want to freeze to death, we'll have to think up other ways than simply shutting down our furnaces.

We can insulate, of course. We can turn down the thermostats. But better we should stay comfortable and still save energy—and in many parts of the country that's simple technologically. We simply put in solar heating systems.

We've all seen designs for solar houses, and hot water heating systems on the roof, and the rest of it. At the moment these are so expensive that only the wealthy can install them—and unless they're eccentric, they don't because they don't have to.

This has to change, and it can. Again it's a question of economics. When the demand for such things is high enough, they can be made by mass production methods instead of by hand as they are presently.

We won't save ourselves by sticking hot water heaters on every roof, but it does lead us to the real favor the Arabs have done us: not forcing us to conserve, but forcing us to think about the alternatives to what we're doing now. Once that process starts I've enough confidence in American engineers—to be corny, in "good old American know-how" to be sure we'll never go back to the smug, complacent, energy-wasting, fossil-burning, air-polluting wasters we used to be.

ALL RIGHT, what are the alternatives? At this point there arises a mighty chorus from science fiction readers as they chant the magic formula: FUSION! I'll probably hear it all the way out here to Studio City. Unfortunately, fusion is *not* the answer to our prayers.

It's very important, of course, and lately there have been breakthroughs that make investment in fusion research very shrewd indeed. I'm not knocking fusion—but we'd be silly if we simply threw money at the fusion people, then sat back and relaxed.

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In the first place, the most optimistic advocates of fusion don't see it as an important source of power before 2010, and that's a long way off. Cut that by 20 years, and we're still in some trouble. Since we're all friends here, let's be frank about something: in any political crisis, and an energy crisis *is* primarily a political crisis, if there's a choice between another Great Depression and anything else, anything else is going to be tried.

Anything else specifically includes: strip mining for coal; strip mining for oil shale; burning high sulfer oil in areas of bad air pollution like my home town; crash programs to throw in nuclear power plants without much regard for safety; ruthless exploitation of the Alaska north slope fields; frenzied off-shore oil drilling; and wars of conquest against oil-rich nations.

REFORMING the political system isn't going to change that fact, either, unless by "reform" one means "making American policy *less* responsive to the will of the majority of the American people." Perhaps, if we changed the political structure so that it would be dominated by sober, thoughtful, right-thinking people like you and me and Jim Baen, we might reach a point at which we'd accept longer hours for lower wages, redistribute the jobs so we'll all have one, send a lot of people back to the farm to substitute human labor for high-energy food production methods, and—what's that? I've lost my concensus already?

Precisely. Let's go back to technology and leave politics for another time and place.

We've agreed that fusion research is vital, and the experts seem agreed that it can't be significant before the end of the century. What's left?

At the moment, there are three major sources of energy: hydro-electric, fossil, and nuclear. Of the three, hydro-electric can't be expanded without environmental costs most of us aren't prepared to pay, even though it is the least polluting of all those we have. The costs of increased hydro-electric power are such things as damming up the Grand Canyon, turning the few remaining wild rivers into chains of silting-up lakes, and generally making a mess of the water balance, not to mention the scenery.

That leaves fossil fuels and nuclear power, and here's where I lose my concensus for the rest of the column. Nuclear power is a touchy subject, and immediately raises the highly important question: is it safe?

No.

In fact, "is it safe?" is precisely the wrong question to ask. Instead, we have to ask whether it is more or less safe than something else, in this case, great expansion of fossil fuels—or getting into the political

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crisis of Depression vs. anything else.

For the past 25 years we have studied the dangers of nuclear power. The federal government has invested well over a billion dollars trying to measure the public health costs and dangers arising from nuclear power plants. There are hundreds of reports on what might happen given one or another accident; how many birth defects we can expect as a result of x number of nuclear plants; increased incidence of cancer as a result of nuclear power; etc., etc.

In the same time period there have been almost no studies of the public health costs and hazards of fossil fuel power plants, and those studies we do have get almost no publicity.

This has to change. How can anyone make intelligent decisions without proper data? Unfortunately, advocates of increased use of nuclear power—and I'm one of those—have to use qualitative arguments because the numbers are not available.

Let's see what we do know. First, it's easily shown that kilowatt for kilowatt, a coal-fired power plant releases more radioactive material to the environment than a nuclear power plant. This is because all coal contains small quantities of radium, and it goes up the flue.

Those who wish to "stop nuclear pollution" counter by pointing out that nuclear plants produce spent fuels and other wastes which have to be stored, and sometimes the storage fails and the stuff gets out. There are two answers to that one: first, the wastes that do escape are concentrated in one place and represent a hazard only to the nuclear workers—the "atomjacks"—and not the general public.

Second, one of the soon-to-come developmetns in technology is the shuttle; and with *that,* and with proper application of nuclear waste solidification technology, nuclear waste disposal becomes a trivial problem: get rid of it forever by shooting it out into space. There's lots of room out there. Obviously, due measures have to be taken to safeguard against accidents, but that's not as hard as it sounds.

We think of nuclear wastes as millions of gallons of liquids, because that's the way they're stored now pending a safe permanent disposal system; but in fact *all* the waste products from all the power plants cumulative to date could be formed into a glass block about 40 feet on a side. It would be a *very* hot block, both chemically and radioactively, but it wouldn't be dangerous except to those near it. Glass is a very stable compound.

The arguments for and against nuclear power could go on all day, but the one clincher argument I would like to use rests on incomplete data. Conceding that nuclear plants have public health costs, and that the wrong kind of accident

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could cause deaths in the thousands, I would like to counter by showing that fossil plants *already* cause more deaths in a ten year period than would the kind of accident to a nuclear plant that could happen *only once in a hundred* years.

It is reliably reported that lowered air quality reduces the average life span by three years. There are varying figures on how many people die from emphasema, lung cancer, general respiratory disease, and heart disease as a result of the garbage put out by fossil plants, but many authorities think there are a *lot.* The most recent issues of *Science* indicate that nuclear power, even with overestimates of the probability of a really severe nuclear accident, is substantially less hazardous than coal; and they haven't even looked at the probability that we might go to war if we rely on fossil fuels and then don't have them.

Let's leave the subject of nuclear safety, but before I do, I'll thank our friends the Arabs for making us think about that, too. We will presently have hard data to base decisions on; and when we do, I expect the public will be ready to look at the subject rationally, because suddenly energy is important to the average man.

SO FAR, then, the Arabs have forced us to look at conservation, funded fusion research at over three times its previous level, got us thinking rationally about nuclear safety, and aimed some pretty bright people at the question of how to overcome nuclear safety problems. That's a pretty good record—and it's still not the biggest favor they did us.

Beyond nuclear fission, beyond even fusion, there is a real problem with energy: the more we liberate, the more heat we release into the atmosphere. Exactly when man-produced heat will have a serious effect on climate varies with the expert you talk to, but no one believes the problem will just go away. It's probably time we did some serious thinking on the subject, if only to save trouble for our grandchildren. Besides, problems like that tend to go on for a long time and when you actually notice them, it may be too late to do anything—unless you've prepared in advance.

As a direct result of the Arab-created energy crisis, the United States is blossoming with all kinds of exotic energy system research. We even have funds for windmills, and a 100 kw. wind-powered generator will be constructed before the end of the decade.

Don't laugh. At the AAAS meeting last February I saw designs for enormous windmill systems to be mounted on barges and anchored in windy off-shore areas; and they are thought to be nearly competitive, economically, with fossil and nuclear systems.

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We're looking hard at geo-thermal power, and boring some new test wells.

A new lens (well, lens-equivalent) that takes scattered light, such as daylight on a cloudy day, and focuses it finely enough to be used for heating, has been developed. Incidentally, the crabs beat us to that invention several million years ago, and biologists specializing in the visual systems of arthropods were instrumental in developing the lens. With such gadgets we can use solar heating even in cloudy areas.

I've mentioned in a previous column the possibility of using sea temperature differences for generating electricity; now that concept is getting serious study and there may be a pilot plant in a few years. This is one of the most interesting systems of all, because it makes use of a continuously renewed resource, sunlight, and adds precisely nothing to the Earth's heat. Moreover, the pollution product is fresh water and cheap protein.

The solar power research teams are suddenly finding money to work on methods for turning sunlight into electricity that don't require monstrous tracking mirrors and other costly gadgets. There's money for development of more efficient solar panels, the kind that power our spacecraft now; there's no theoretical reason why a much larger percentage of sunlight can't be turned directly into electricity, and with more efficient solar panels plus lower costs to orbit them, we may yet live to see space-based power plants.

On a more prosaic level, coal research is getting almost an embarrassment of riches. There's money for gassification studies, more efficient fuel cells, new mining methodology, ways to clean up after the strip mines are finished, and more.

Suddenly, the United States is energy conscious, and our talents and resources are aimed at new ways to get more energy for less environmental cost. I have a great deal of confidence in American technologists, and I'm confident that we'll find not one, but many, new and better ways to run our power plants.

The consequences of those discoveries will reach far outside the United States. We live in a small island of wealth set in the midst of a sea of poverty. The remedy for famine and misery throughout the world will depend, at bottom, on low-cost energy. We weren't looking for that so long as there was lots of cheap oil coming in from overseas. Now we are, and when we find it, everyone will benefit.

It may even be that historians fifty years from now will see this decade's importance primarily in terms of energy research. Meanwhile, I think we should all give three rousing cheers for our friends, the Arabs. ★

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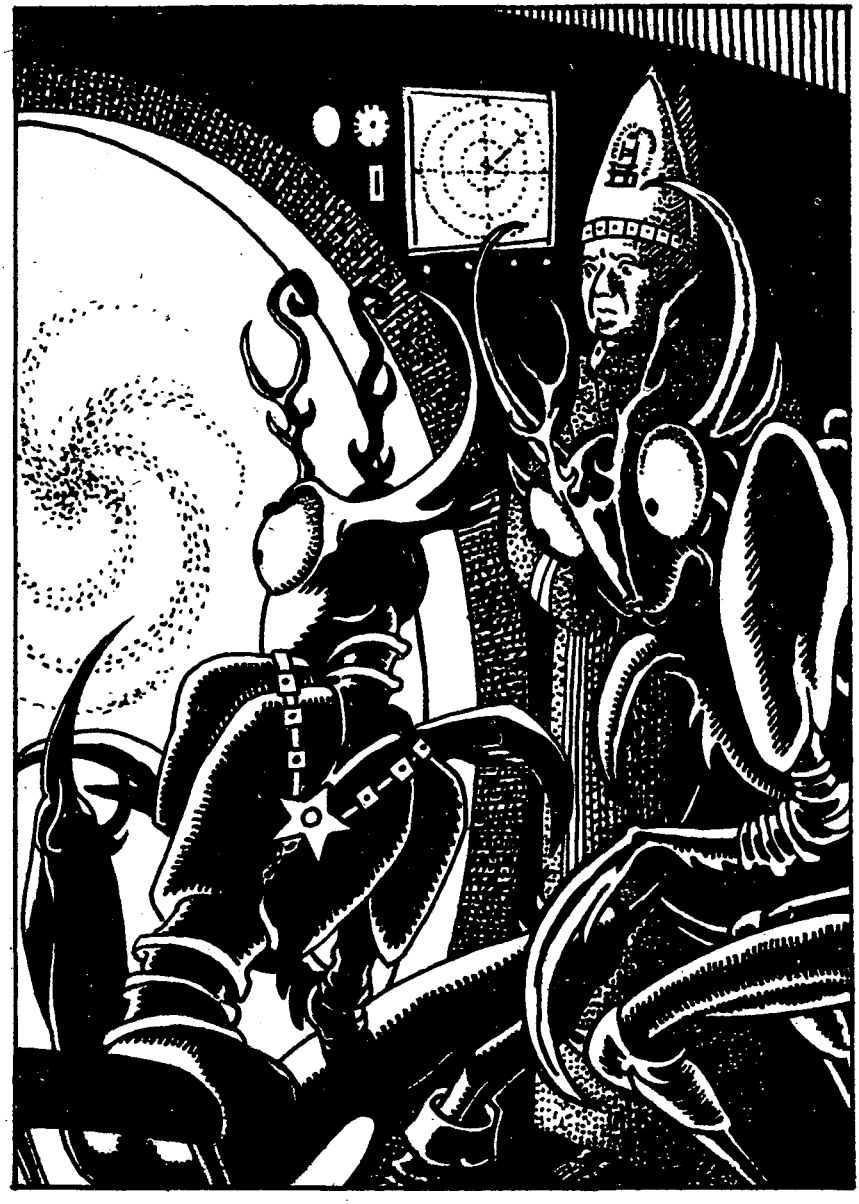

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As it was in the beginning . . .

BIG BLACK WHOLE

STEVEN UTLEY

POPE IRVING IX, nee Curtis Wayne Hayakawa, Jr., was in the process of explaining to Commander Makmordic why it was that unlike the Holy Church the infidel Suth'n Babtists of Sol and Alpha Centauri did not have figurines of the Savior seated in *their* symbolic electric chairs when the lights suddenly went out for a second. Two seconds later, a strident hoot from the bridge shocked Makmordic out of her surprise.

Casting an apologetic look at His Holiness, the mistress of the *S. V. Elbog* rose from her sling and depressed an intercom stud on the wall of her cabin. "Makmordic here," she whistled. "What is your matter?"

"I'm not exactly certain, Commander," came Sub-Commander Ledicla's deep, metal-raspy reply from the bridge. The statement was punctuated by a worried-sounding honk rather like the noise ancient Terran steam locomotives used to make when they contrived to fall off their tracks while traveling at high speeds. Dread immediately began to curdle and crawl about within Makmordic's cassava melon-shaped thorax. She knew what her junior officer's nerve filaments were made of—after all, the sub-commander had served under her, not to mention at her side, during the recent war against those perfectly dreadful tripeds of Dasfis—as so she realized that whatever it was that could rattle the legendarily imperturbable Ledicla certainly deserved her own respect.

"We made the scheduled forty-light-year jump through unspace out from Stahl," Ledicla continued, "and were supposed to reemerge within five xams' distance of our destination. However, though I have not yet been able to locate the error, we appear to have made some rather gross miscalculation or another, for we have badly overshot Glom."

"Miscalculated?" Makmordic piped in questioning tones. "Overshot?"

"We have come out in deep space, Commander."

"Neh? Deep space?"

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"Deep space?" echoed His Holiness, who now hovered behind Makmordic and nervously twirled a finely crafted electrofix on a gem-encrusted finger. "You mean, between *galaxies*?"

"Deeper," Ledicla replied. "The deepest possible space, it seems. We appear to have emerged on the very rim of the universe itself!"

"*WHAT?*" Makmordic's shriek was accompanied by a burst of inarticulate orchestration from the Pope.

"Off to port," the sub-commander went on, "the galaxy clusters appear as a single billowing cloud of light, and—"

"Sub-Commander Ledicla, have you been licking the damper rods again?" Makmordic sternly demanded. Ledicla's sundry minor vices were known to her. Furthermore, she could recall a time when his fondness for damper rods had greatly enhanced certain aspects of their former relationship. The radiation burns had been rather painful, however, and so she had finally broken it off with him. Besides, he always became disgusting loopy when he had been on one of his damper rod-licking binges.

"I am merely reporting what I see," Ledicla protested. "The—"

"Plug the image into my wall screen immediately!"

"I regret to report that there is no image, Commander."

"Neh? *Neh?*" Makmordic's nictitating membranes started to click together spasmodically. "*No image?*"

"I am in the observation blister," Ledicla explained, "watching the phenomenon with my naked eyes. There is a great deal of *noise* emanating from the cloud. Electrons and protons. Most of the ship's receptors screamed and shorted out at the instant we left unspace. The guidance systems have also been ruined. The *Elbog* is now on emergency power. I had to use the main generators to raise maximum density shields against the electron barrage. And—"

"I am coming to the bridge," the commander hissed, menace in her tones. "Your breath had better not glow, I warn you, Ledicla."

As the commander switched off the intercom, Pope Irving began to tug gently at one of her armored joints. "What do your suppose the trouble is?" he asked in a quivering voice.

"Aspergonk knows." Makmordic sighed, shuddered and somewhat reluctantly withdrew her joint from the Pope's grasp. The Pope, being a pope and all, did not know about erogenous zones in general and the erogenous zones of Makmordic's species in particular. She rubbed her joint tenderly for a moment. "Whatever the problem is, I expect we'll soon know all about it. Will you accompany me to the bridge, Your Holiness?"

His Holiness accepted the invitation, which was only a formality

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anyway. He could go anywhere he pleased aboard the *Elbog*. He was footing the bill for this trip.

Makmordic turned and, with Pope Irving at her heels, scuttered purposefully from her quarters. Though her thorax continued to gurgle with disquiet, the pigmentation was carefully chosen to display pleasantness and general well-being of spirit for the benefit of the passengers on board. None of the passengers seemed inclined to inquire as to the significance of the momentary dimming of the lights. All of the passengers were theologians with more important matters on their minds. The corridors of the *Elbog* thronged with beings mingling to exchange views on, and occasional blows over, Supreme Entities.

There were tree-root worshippers, ear-wax enshriners, pterodactyl totemizers, apostles of Aspergonk, battlers for Briquebat, converts to Camshaft.

There were Zonds, Doowahs and Druids.

There were two Quakers, a few Shakers and several fakirs.

There were furry struiomimi, man-sized ostrichoid reptiles, who spent virtually all of their adult lives locked in ritual debate over whether or not the second (or perhaps it was the third) syllable of their particular Heavenly Progenitor's Holy Name could be pronounced and, if so, by whom.

There were sentient singing stones that had embraced the Holy Church's teachings and now lent their soft, eerie harmonies to its songs. The air in the passageways throbbed subtly with *"kyrie electron. kyrie electron."*

All had been summoned to Glom by the head of the Church for what was discreetly referred to as the Third Inter-Species Ecumenical Council but what, in view of the Church's recent expulsion from the vicinity of Sol and Alpha Centauri by the Suth'n Babtists, was expected to turn out to be a *bona fide* council of war. Pope Irving IX was generally regarded as a patient, understanding individual, but even he had not quite been about to forgive and forget the way the accursed Babtists had sent him, via a neutral trading vessel, six bishops in thirty-six individually wrapped pieces.

Accompanying the bishops had been a crudely penned note to the effect that the Babtists had succeeded in coverting all sentient Solarians and Centaurians to the true faith. This had left a lot of cathedrals sitting around uselessly, so the Babtists had had them remodeled and turned into bingo emporiums.

"This is not at *all* kosher of them," His Holiness had grumbled, and so the call had gone out to all non-Babtist-affiliated religious leaders.

The Babtists had naturally scheduled a council of their very own.

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Actually, neither the Babtists nor the Church and its allies really wanted a war. Both sides were sort of hoping that the Supreme Being would be swayed toward whoever held the more impressive council and thus loose His/Her/Its wrath upon the losers, thereby settling the matter for all time.

Cobalt-colored Ledicla stepped away from the observation blister as Commander Makmordic and the Pope entered the bridge, which stank of ozone and melted plastic. "I believe I was mistaken," said the sub-commander, "when I reported that we somehow overshot Glom. Our calculations were probably correct, and we probably re-emerged from unspace at the proper point. Glom, had moved."

He half-turned to indicate the observation blister with a noisy wave of an elbowless appendage. Ledicla's metallic epidermis tended to squeak like rusty bedsprings whenever he moved. During the war against Dasfis, his racket had driven Makmordic bananas in less than a week; this was another reason for her breaking up with him.

Makmordic and Pope Irving were struck speechless with awe and terror when they stepped into the observation blister and looked out. Off to starboard, there was nothing, not a star, not so much as a dust mote, *nothing*. Off to port was an immense sheet of bluish-white fire, shimmering in the firmament like an iridiscent curtain. In diameter, it must have been billions of light years and then some. Galaxies could be seen spiraling together in slow motion. Against the swirling,, shifting background of white flame, small points of light—stars—erupted into short-lived red, yellow and orange blossoms as inconceivable tidal stresses ripped them apart. There were whirlpools and tornadoes. It all looked very, very evil.

"Even as we watch," Ledicla rasped softly, "Space and Time are being twisted completely out of shape. It must have begun while we were in unspace, hence, our present position here on the fringe of things. By the time we came out into normal space, everything else in the universe had already been drawn together. That fire cloud is the whole of Creation. Note how with incredible swiftness everything is converging upon a central point. Ourselves included, Commander."

Makmordic wheeled to regard her junior officer with horror. "Can we not jump back into unspace and escape?"

The sub-commander shook his head audibly. "The *Elbog*'s controls are dead. We undoubtedly began to accelerate in the direction of the fire cloud as soon as we came out of unspace. Even with power, the ship probably could not escape the pull of the cloud's core."

"*Core?*" Comprehension flared in Makmordic's light-sensitive organs. "You mean—"

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Ledicla nodded solemnly, albeit somewhat noisily. "A black hole lies within the cloud. Is, in fact, responsible for the creation of the cloud."

His Holiness frowned with bewilderment. "A black hole?"

"A neutron star," Makmordic piped dully. "When a sun, or, for that matter, anything capable of doing so, super-novas, it violently sheds its electrons and protrons. With nothing left to keep them apart any longer, the neutrons then implode into a dense little wad. A star the size of Glom, for instance, would be compressed into a heatless, lightless ball not much bigger than a mung-pea. However, it would still retain approximately seventy per cent of its original mass. Anything which got too close would be sucked in, stripped of its own protons and electrons, then spread about one neutron thick over the surface of the original wad." The mistress of the *Elbog* gently eased herself into an uncushioned seat. "How long do you estimate it will be before we feel its full effect, Ledicla?"

The sub-commander pursed his shiny lips thoughtfully. He had overcome his initial horror of the sight in the heavens and now looked every inch the gallant officer who had unflinchingly induced terminal petrification in many a Dasfisan. Makmordic loved him then and gathered her own courage.

"We should," Ledicla finally said, "disintegrate into atoms within the next five minutes and then into sub-atomic particles sometime shortly thereafter."

"Will it hurt?" whimpered the Pope as he sagged against the wall and let his electrofix slip from nerveless fingers. The two officers ignored him.

"Just how big *is* the hole at the center of the cloud?" Makmordic quietly asked.

"There is no way of determining its original size," Ledicla replied, "But such instruments as are still functioning properly indicate that it's now roughly four times as big as Betelgeuse."

"Great Aspergonk!" the commander whistled. "That would make it more than a billion miles in diameter!"

"What could have *made* such a thing?" sobbed His Holiness. "*What?*"

Sub-Commander Ledicla shook his head and shrugged, making a sound like a loosely packed box of metal pans tumbling down a staircase. "All the matter in the universe probably wouldn't be enough. We will, alas, never know just what it was that imploded into this black hole of black holes."

All around them, the *S. V. Elbog* began to hum and glow.

"Dear God," Pope Irving IX muttered, sliding to his knees. He would never know it, of course, but he had just answered his own question. ★

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ORBITSVIL

BOB SHAW

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

In the 24th Century mankind has developed interstellar travel and is tackling the huge task of siphoning off Earth's excess population. Unfortunately, only one other habitable planet, Terranova, has been discovered, and an economic brake has been placed on the flow of settlers to it by making the journey highly expensive. This policy was introduced and enforced by the vast Starflight Corporation which controls all manufacture and operation of spacecraft. Most of the Starflight fleet is engaged in the transportation of settlers, but it has a separate Stellar Exploration Arm which continues with the search for habitable new worlds. The President of Starflight, Elizabeth Lindstrom, is the richest and most powerful human ever. She has been debased and corrupted by her power to the extent where—like sultans of old—she has been known to kill employees for minor transgressions.

VANCE GARAMOND, *captain of the exploration ship* Bissendorf, *was about to leave Earth on a year-long mission and was summoned to Elizabeth's headquarters for a preflight audience. While waiting impatiently for his interview he was entrusted with the job of looking after Elizabeth Lindstrom's small son,* HARALD. *Garamond, who was becoming disenchanted with the fruitless search for other planets was too busy with his own thoughts to notice Harald climbing up a tall statue. Before Garamond could prevent the accident, the boy fell and was killed. Garamond knew at once that not only was he doomed, but that the President's psychosis would prompt her to wreak vengeance on his wife,* AILEEN, *and his own son,* CHRISTOPHER.

He discovered, however, that the boy's death fall had not been observed, so he hid the body and slipped away from Starflight House. Concealing his panic, he collected his wife and son from their apartment and took them to the spaceport. At gunpoint he forced a shuttle pilot to fly them up to the Bissendorf *which was waiting in orbit. Knowing that the dead child would be found at any moment, Garamond got through on the radio to his second-in-command and close friend,* CLIFF NAPIER, *and ordered him to blank out all communications between the* Bissendorf *and Earth. The precaution was taken just in time—back at Starflight HQ Harald's body had been discovered, Elizabeth had already slain the luckless servant who made the find, and had sent out an order that Garamond was to be brought back to her.*

Aboard his ship Garamond ordered it to leave the Solar System at maximum speed and was lucky in that the spatial "tide" was favorable to him. The ships employed by Earth could operate more efficiently in regions where the density of

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space was high, and in this case the local conditions enabled Garamond to escape his pursuers. The trouble was that he had nowhere to go—there was no point in fleeing to Terranova because Elizabeth's ships would be there waiting for him.

The Bissendorf was provisioned for a year, so Garamond decided to use that time to follow up a private dream. He owned photographs of partially destroyed starmaps which had been found on Sagania, a planet which had been destroyed by a nuclear reaction thousands of years previously. Discrepancies in the maps suggested to Garamond that one star had been of special significance to the long-dead Saganians, and he decided to solve the mystery.

On completing the four-month journey, the Bissendorf's crew made an astonishing find—a sun completely enclosed within a spherical shell which was more than 300 million kilometers in diameter. They surveyed the object, located a single small entrance at its equator and one group passed through it to discover that the inner surface of the sphere was covered with vegetation and had breatheable air. Hulks of hundreds of destroyed spaceships were clustered outside the entrance and just inside it were ruins of ancient fortifications. A great battle had been fought there long ago, but there was no sign of life.

The sphere, dubbed Orbitsville, appeared to offer perfect living space equivalent to many billions of Earths. The discovery elevated Garamond to a level of fame and importance at which he and his family seemed safe, even from Elizabeth Lindstrom. He sent a faster-than-light signal to Earth, reporting the find, then his science team began to investigate some of Orbitsville's mysteries, including the puzzle of why radio communication was impossible within the sphere.

Four months later Elizabeth arrived at the head of a fleet, assumed control and in a tense interview with Garamond revealed that Starflight intended to exploit emigration to Orbitsville and parcel it out just as if it was a normal planet. Settlers begin to arrive almost immediately. Disillusioned and feeling useless, Garamond settled down with his family and watched the human settlement spread outward into Orbitsville's infinite prairies—then a new discovery was made. Orbitsville was not empty and free for the taking. An alien civilization was encountered close to the entrance. Communications could not be established with the gentle aliens unofficially called "Clowns". But while they presented no threat, their settlement ringed the entrance and they were thus an obstacle.

When reports began to appear on television describing a Clown massacre of humans on an outer

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planet, Garamond decided to act. It was obvious that the patently absurd reports were propaganda meant to prepare the human population for an attack on "Clown City." He decided to take the Bissendorf *to the outer planet to collect data that would disprove the reports. To his surprise Elizabeth Lindstrom offered no resistance to the plan.*

While on the outer planet Garamond was shocked to discover his wife had accepted an invitation from Elizabeth Lindstrom to stay with Christopher at the palace. Anxiously he hastened preparations for the return. The Bissendorf *was over half way back when its field generators exploded, robbing the ship of its means of deceleration. They seemed doomed to ionize themselves on the impregnable outer shell of Orbitsville, but a desperate plan was put forth—the ship would be aimed at the entrance to Orbitsville, its electron gun being used to create an atmospheric tunnel, thus enabling the* Bissendorf *to hurtle through the aperture, crash through Beachhead City and skip along the upper fringes of Orbitsville's air shelf, gradually shedding velocity until it came to a stop. Beachhead City was evacuated and its inhabitants watched as the ship plunged into Orbitsville in an appalling display of violet fire. Elizabeth Lindstrom watched with not a little satisfaction what she believed to be Vance Garamond's funeral pyre.*

Five days later, the Bissendorf *came to a stop, irreparably damaged by the ordeal but with most of the crew alive—fifteen million kilometers from Beachhead City. Recognizing the almost insurmountable difficulties involved in returning over so immense a distance, most of the crew chose to remain and colonize the area where they landed. Garamond, however, decided to attempt to return to Beachhead City. For although he had no hopes of saving Aileen and Christopher from Elizabeth's vengeance, he had planned a revenge of his own. He intended to kill Elizabeth Lindstrom.*

He ordered that a fleet of ships be built from the wreck of the Bissendorf *and that, in lieu of radio communications, a way be found to guide the ships on the long journey back. The ship scientists under the direction of Chief Science Officer* DENNIS O'HAGAN *discovered they could get a bearing on Beachhead City by using delton particles.*

Since the crash, the crew's time had had to be divided between Garamond's project and the building of a settlement—to their increasing dissatisfaction. Bitter and preoccupied, Garamond did not notice the growing restlessness of the crew until after an accident occurred in the testing of one of the ships. He was confronted by TROY LITMAN, *his senior production executive. Litman accused him of*

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keeping the men from the work necessary to their survival in the new colony, and of making harsh demands while remaining remote from the actual production of the project. The crew backed Litman in his criticism of Garamond and threatened to leave the ships unfinished. While Garamond managed to talk the men into finishing, he recognized the truth in Litman's accusations, and began to oversee the work himself.

Soon after the confrontation with Litman a delta particle was recorded. The ships were soon completed, and—despite warnings from O'Hagan that the recording came too soon—Garamond set out on the return journey.

XVI

DAY *8.-Estimated range: 94,350 kilometers*

This is to be sort of a diary. But I am determined to avoid the abbreviations traditionally used by diarists, abbreviations whose function is to shorten a necessary task. My aim is to prolong a superfluous one. (The term "ship's log" might be more appropriate than "diary". But, again, a log is a record of the events of a voyage, whereas my daily entries are likely to concern only pseudo-events in a continuum of pure monotony.) (If I go on splitting hairs like this about the precise meaning of words in the opening sentence, I'll never get beyond it; but the reference to abbreviations isn't quite right, either. I intend to use the symbol "O" instead of writing out "Orbitsville" in full each time. O is much shorter than Orbitsville, but that is coincidental—it is also more expressive of the reality.)

Cliff Napier was right when he guessed I was glad the job of manufacturing autopilots was beyond our resources. My reasoning was that flying the ship by hand would keep us occupied and help reduce boredom. It isn't working out that way, though. There are five of us on board and we spell each other at the controls on a rota arranged so that the two most experienced pilots, Braunek and myself, are in the dockpit at daybreak and nightfall. These are the only times when flying the ship is more difficult than, say, driving an automobile. Because day and night are caused by bands of light and darkness sweeping over the land at orbital speed there is no proper dawn or proper dusk, and some fairly violent meteorological processes take place.

In the "morning" a sector of cold air which has been sinking steadily for hours suddenly finds itself warming up again and rising, causing anything from clear-air turbulence to heavy rain. At nightfall the situation is reverse. It can be even more tricky because the air that cools and begins to descend conflicts with currents rising from the

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still warm ground.

What it amounts to is that there are two half-hour periods when the control column comes to life. Not enough to occupy us for the next three to four years, I'm afraid, although we in the lead ship are a little luckier than the others. That is, we have a little extra work to do. There is the inertial course reference to be monitored, for instance. A simple-looking black box, created by O'Hagan and his team. Inside it is a monomaniacal electronic brain that thinks of nothing but the bearing they fed into it. Any time we begin to wander off course, a digital counter instructs us to go left or right till we're back on line again. The rest of the squadron follows suit.

Linked to the black box is a one-meter-square delton detector which in a year or two, as we get considerably closer to Beachhead City, should begin to pick up other delta particles and provide course confirmation. Sometimes I watch it, just in case, or just to pass the time, but there isn't really any need. It would feed a fresh bearing into the course reference automatically. Also, it is fitted with an audio attention getter. I still watch it, though . . . and dream about EL. No abbreviations: Elizabeth Lindstrom.

Day 23. Estimated range: 278,050 kilometers

We have completed perhaps a fortieth of the journey, having flown a distance roughly equivalent to going around the Earth seven times. Without stopping. Another way to reckon it is that after 23 days we have gone nearly as far as a ray of light would have traveled in one second, but that's a depressing thought for anyone accustomed to Arthurian flight at multiples of lightspeed. A more positive thought is that we've learned quite a lot about O.

Somehow I had always thought of it as composed entirely of featureless prairie, but I was wrong. Perhaps it started off that way, eons ago, and the subsequent actin of wind led to the formation of the mountains we have seen. None were very high, not more than a couple of thousand meters, but with the land area of five billion Earths not yet explored who's to say what will be found? Mountains are there, anyway, and some are capped with snow because our flight is taking us into the winter sector. In addition we sometimes sight rivers and small seas. Our formation passes over them in a dead-straight line, quietly and steadily, and sometimes the telescopes pick up herds of grazing animals. Perhaps early settlers will not have to rely exclusively on vegetable protein, after all.

The unexpected variegation of the terrain is making the journey a little easier to endure. But after a time all seas are the same, all hills look alike . . .

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When I wrote in an earlier entry that the five of us in the lead ship were luckier than the others in having more to do, I was not thinking about the members of the science staff. Sammy Yamoto in No. 4 seems to be fully occupied with astronomical readings, including precise measurements of the width of the day and night bands as we cross them, or as they cross us. He now says that even with improvised equipment he could probably take a bearing on Beachhead City that would be accurate to within a degree or so. I suspect he is passing up his turn at the flying controls so that he can carry on with his work. I hope that is not the case, because he is one of the least expert pilots and needs the practice. Although five per ship is ample crew strength, this could be cut down, by illness for example, and I'm making no provision for unscheduled stops. Any ships that have to go down for long periods will be stripped and left behind. With their crews.

Cliff Napier in No. 2 is filling in free time by helping Denise Serra record radiation and gravity fluctuations.

Sometimes—in fact, quite often—I find myself wishing Denise were on my ship. I could have arranged that of course, but I had wanted to play fair with her. Having turned her down that night, I felt the least I could do was avoid obstructing the field. But now . . . now when I dream of Aileen and Chris, I dream they are dead. That means I'm beginning to accept it, and with the acceptance my pragmatic, faithless body seems to be nominating Aileen's successor. I feel ashamed of that, but maybe the attraction is not as purely physical as I was supposing. Delia Liggett, a catering supervisor on the *Bissendorf*, is on my ship and two of the other men on board have a good practical relationship with her—but I can't work up much interest in a hot bunking system. I'm positive this isn't a ridiculous remnant of a captain-to-crew attitude, a notion that I ought to have her exclusively because my uniform shows the most silver braid.

Outside the agreed goals of this mission I have the old command structure, probably with some assistance from the pervading influence of the Big O, completely discarded. I do remember, though, feeling some surprise at the make-up of the thirty-nine volunteers who came with me. My first supposition was that they would all be of executive rank and above, career-oriented men and women determined to take the *Bissendorf* incident in stride. Instead I found that more than half the seventy original volunteers were ordinary crewmen. Those chosen—by a selection procedure that cut the number down to the precise requirement—I regard and treat as exact equals.

O makes us equal.

In comparison to it we are re-

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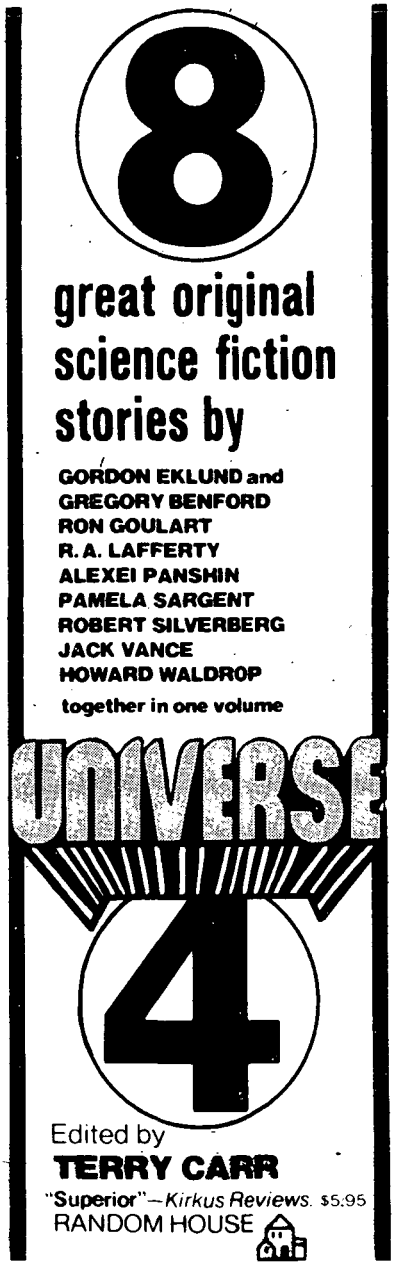
duced to the ultimate degree: human electrons, too small to show disparity.

Day 54. Estimated range: 620,000 kilometers

We have completed our first scheduled landing and are in flight again. After fifty days in the air, the prospect of three days on the ground was exhilarating. We landed in formation on a level plain, the eight fully qualified pilots at the controls, and spent practically all the down-time gathering grass and loading it into the processing machines. This is what passes for winter on O. The sun is still directly overhead, naturally. But with the days being shorter, the temperature does not build up as high and has a much longer time to bleed away at night. The result is a certain briskness in the air during the day and nights actually cold. All of which makes me wonder why the designers of O bothered to build in a mechanism to provide seasons. If my hostel-for-the-galaxy notion is correct, presumably the designers made a survey of intelligent lifeforms in their region of space to see what the environmental requirements were. And if that were the case, the majority of life-bearing worlds must closely resemble Earth, even to the extent of having a moderately tilted axis and a procession of seasons. Could this, for some reason I don't fathom, be a universal prerequisite for the evolu-



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tion of intelligence? No, how could that be? Men had evolved in equatorial Earth regions where the seasons hardly varied.

It seems that weather isn't going to be any problem during future stops, but our physical condition might. The simple task of cutting and gathering grass pretty well exhausted many of us. So we have worked up exercises that can be performed on board ship.

Day 86. Estimated range: 1,038,000 kilometers

With more than a million kilometers behind us, it was beginning to look as though our journey time would be better than predicted. But the starboard propeller bearing on ship No. 7 has started to show wear. This is causing vibration at maximum cruise and we have had to reduce fleet speed by twelve kilometers per hour. The alarming thing is that the propeller-shaft bearings on all the ships are supposed to be Magnelube Alloy Grade E. It is inconceivable that a bearing made to that specification could show wear after only 83 days of continuous running. The suspicion crosses my mind that Litman may have substituted Magnelube D, or even C. I cannot believe he would have done so out of pure malice. Probably there had been a shortage of blocks of the top-grade metal. If I had discovered that, I would have ordered a redesign or would have stripped some of the *Bissendorf's* main machinery to get the bearings. Either way, Litman would have had a lot of extra work on his hands, and the person he had become would not have taken kindly to that.

We must now keep a careful watch on all propeller-shaft bearings because we carry no stocks of Magnelube Alloy and, in any case, barely retain the ability to machine it to the required tolerances. Like archaeologists burrowing deeper into the past, we are retrogressing through various levels of technical competence.

Meanwhile the flight continues uninterrupted. Over prairies, lakes, mountains, seas, forests—and then over more and more of the same. A million kilometers is an invisible fraction of O's circumference yet so enormous that contemplating has stunned my mind. I was taught at school that a man's brain is unable to comprehend what is meant by a light-year—now I know we cannot comprehend as much as a light-second. So far on this journey we have, in effect, encircled twenty-five Earths; but my heart and mind are suspended, like netted birds, somewhere above the third or fourth range of mountains. They have run into the comprehension barrier while my body has traveled onward, heedless of what penalties may thus be incurred.

Day 93. Estimated range: 1,080,000 kilometers

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Like Litman, like the others, I am becoming a different person.

I sometimes go for a whole day without thinking of Elizabeth Lindstrom. And now I can think of Aileen and Chris without experiencing much pain. It is as if they are in a mental jewel box. I can take them out, examine them, receive pleasure—then put them back and close the lid. Perhaps the life of a loved one must be considered algebraically—setting the positive total of happiness and contentment against the negative quantity represented by pain and death. The equation, even for a very short life, can result in a positive expression. I wish I could discuss this idea with someone who might understand but Denise is on another ship.

Day 109. Estimated range: 1,207,000 kilometers

We have lost Tayman's ship, No. 6. It happened while landing for our second scheduled stop, putting down in formation on an ideal-looking plain. A hidden spar of rock wrecked one of Tayman's skids, causing the plane to dip a wing. Nobody was hurt, but No. 6 had to be written off. In future we will land in sequence on the lead aircraft's skid marks to reduce the risk of similar incidents. Tayman and his crew—which includes two women—took the mishap philosophically and we spent an extra day on the ground getting them set up for a prolonged stay. Among the parts we took from No. 6 were the propeller-shaft bearings, one of which was immediately installed in No. 7's starboard engine.

So fleet speed is back to maximum cruise. Still, the loss of Jack Tayman's sturdy optimism is hard to accept. Strangely, I find myself missing his aircraft most at night. We have no radio altimeters or equivalents because the conditions on O will not permit electromagnetic transmission. Also, the environment makes barometric pressure readings too unreliable. So we use the ancient device of two inclined spotlights on each aircraft, one at each end of the fuselage. The forward laser ray is colored red, the aft one white, and they intersect at five hundred meters, which means that a ship at the chosen height projects a single pink spot on the ground. Looking through the darkness we can see our V-formation slipping across the ground, hour after hour, a squadron of silent moons, and the disappearance of one of those luminous followers is all too apparent.

Day 140. Estimated range: 1,597,000 kilometers

Within the space of ten days propeller-shaft bearing trouble developed on six ships. Fleet speed has been reduced by fifty kilometers per hour. Prognosis is that there will be continued deterioration, with progressive cuts in flying speed. Everybody is properly dis-

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mayed but I think I can detect an undercurrent of relief at the possibility of so many aircraft having to drop out at the same time, thus providing for the setting up of a larger and stronger community. I have discussed the situation with Cliff Napier over the lightphone and even he seems to be losing heart.

The only thing at all "hopeful" is that the ships in trouble are No. 3 through No. 8, reflecting the order in which they came off the production line. The first and second ships—mine and Napier's—are all right. It may be that Litman had enough Grade E metal available for our propeller bearings. I put "hopeful" in quotes because being reduced to two airplanes at this stage of the mission would be disastrous. It would take fairly comprehensive technical resources to restore us to strength—resources not available.

I am writing this at night, mainly because I can't sleep. I find it difficult to fight off a sense of defeat. The Big O is too . . .

Garamond set aside his stylus as Joe Braunek, who had been in the cockpit serving as stand-by pilot, appeared in the gangway beside his bunk. The young man's face was deeply shadowed by the single overhead light tube but his eyes, within their panda-patches of darkness, were showing an abnormal amount of white.

"What is it, Joe?" Garamond closed his diary.

"Well, sir . . ."

"Vance."

"Sorry, I keep. . . . Do you want to come up front a minute, Vance? There are some lights we can't explain."

"Which panel?"

Braunek shook his head. "Not that sort of light. Outside the ship—near the horizon. Looks like a city or something ahead of us."

XVII

At first sight the lights were disappointing. Even when Braunek had shown him where to look, Garamond had to scan the darkness for several seconds before managing to pick out a thin line of yellowish radiance.

Delia Liggett, at the controls, raised her face to him. "Is there any chance that . . .?"

"It isn't Beachhead City," Garamond said.

"I thought there might have been a mistake about distances."

"Sorry, Delia. We're working on a very rough estimate of how far the *Bissendorf* traveled, but not that rough. You can start watching for Beachhead City in earnest a couple of years from now."

"Then what is that place?"

Garamond perversely refused to admit excitement. "Who knows? Some natural feature, maybe."

"No," Braunek said, handing

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Garamond a pair of binoculars. "Try these."

"It has to be an alien settlement," Garamond admitted as the glasses revealed the beaded brightness of a distant city. "A hell of a ways from the aperture!"

At that moment Cliff Napier's voice came through on the lightphone. "Number Two speaking—do you read?"

"I hear you, Cliff."

"Have you seen what we've seen?"

"Yeah—and are you wondering what I'm wondering?"

Napier hesitated. "You mean, what's an alien city doing way out here? I guess they got to Orbitsville a long time before we did. It might have taken them hundreds, even thousands, of years to drift out this far."

"Why did they bother? You've seen what Orbitsville's like—one part is as good as another."

"To us, Vance. Aliens could see things a different way."

"I don't know," Garamond said dubiously. He dropped into one of the supernumerary seats and fixed his eyes on the horizon, waiting for the wall of daylight to rush toward him from the east. When it came, about an hour later, sweeping over the ground with mind-paralyzing speed, the alien settlement abruptly became an even less noticeable feature of the landscape. Although now only a hundred kilometers off, the "city" was reduced in the binoculars to a mere dusting of variegated dots almost lost in greenery. During lightphone conversations among the aircraft there had been voiced the idea that it might be possible to obtain new propeller bearings or have the existing ones modified. Garamond himself had been quietly hopeful about the aliens' level of technology—but his optimism began to fade. As the intervening distance shortened, the community hovering beyond the nose of his ship reminded him of a nineteenth century town in the American West.

"Looks pretty rustic to me." Ralston, the telegeologist, had borrowed the glasses and was peering through them.

Garamond nodded. "This is completely illogical, of course. We can't measure other cultures with our own as a yardstick. But I have a feeling that's a low-technology agricultural community. I believe any race that settles on Orbitsville likely will turn into farmers. There's no need to do anything else."

"Hold on a minute, Vance." Ralston's voice was taut. "Maybe we're going to get those bearings, after all. I think I see an airplane."

Astounded, Garamond took the binoculars. After a moment's search he found a complicated bright speck hanging purposefully in the lower levels of the air. The absence of any lateral movement suggested the other plane was flying directly away from or directly

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toward his own, and his intuition told him the latter was the case. He kept watching through the powerful gyro-stabilized glasses and presently saw other motes of colored brightness rising, swarming uncertainly, then settling into the apparently motionless state that meant they were flying to meet him head-on. Ralston gave the alert to the six other ships of the fleet.

"It's a welcoming party, all right," he said as the unknown planes became visible to the naked eye, "and we've no weapons. What do we do if they attack us?"

"We have to assume they're friendly, or at least not hostile." Garamond adjusted the fine focus on the binoculars. "Besides—I know I'm judging them by our standards again—but that doesn't look like an air force to me. The planes are all different colors."

"Like ancient knights going out to do battle."

"Could be, but I don't think so. The planes seem pretty small, and all different types." A stray thought crossed Garamond's mind. He turned his attention back to the city from which the planes had arisen, and was still scanning it with growing puzzlement when the two fleets of aircraft met and coalesced.

A green-and-yellow low-wing monoplane took up station beside Garamond's ship and wiggled its wings in what, thanks to the strictures of aerial dynamics, had to be the universal greeting of airmen. The alien craft had a small blister-type canopy through which could be seen a humanoid form. Braunek, now at the controls, laughed delightedly and repeated the signal. The tiny plane near their wingtip followed suit, as did a blue biplane beyond it.

"Communication!" he shouted. "They aren't like the Clowns, Vance—we'll be able to talk to these people."

"Good. See if you can get their permission to land," Garamond said dryly.

"Right." Braunek, unaware of the irony, became absorbed in making an elaborate series of gestures while Garamond twisted around in his seat to observe as many of the alien ships as he could. He had noted earlier that no two were painted alike; now he was able to confirm that they differed radically in design as well. Most were propeller-driven but at least two were powered by gas turbines and one racy-looking job had the appearance of a home-made rocket ship. In general the alien planes were of conventional cruciform configuration although he glimpsed at least one canard and a twin-fuselage craft.

"A bit of a mixture," Ralston commented, and added with a note of disappointment in his voice. "I see a lot of internal combustion engines out there. If that's the level they're at they won't be much use to us."

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"How about supplies of fossil fuel?"

"There could be some about—depends on the age of Orbitsville." Ralston surveyed the ground below with professional disgust. "My training isn't worth a damn out here. The ordinary rules don't apply."

"I think it's okay to go down," Braunek said. "Our friend has dipped his nose a couple of times."

"Right. Pass the word along."

As the fringes of the alien settlement began to slide below the nose of the aircraft, Braunek sat higher in his seat and turned his head from side to side. "I can't see their airfield. We'll have to circle around."

Garamond tapped the pilot's shoulder. "I think you'll find they haven't got a centralized airfield."

THE aircraft banked into a turn, giving a good view of the ground. The city wheeling below the wing was at least twenty kilometers across but had no distinguishable roads, factories or large buildings. Garamond's impression was of thousands of hunting lodges scattered in an area of woodland. Here and there, randomly distributed, were irregular cleared areas about the size of football fields. The brightly colored alien planes dispersed toward these, crossing flight paths at low altitude in an uncontrolled manner that brought gasps from Braunek. They landed unceremoniously, one to a field, leaving the visiting ships still aloft in the circuit.

"This is crazy—I'm not going to try putting us down in somebody's back yard," Braunek announced.

"Find a good strip outside of town and we'll land in sequence the way we planned," Garamond told him. He sat back in his seat and buckled his safety straps. The plane lost altitude, completed two low-level orbits and landed, with a short jolting run on its skids, in an expanse of meadow. Braunek steered it off to one side and they watched as the six other ships of the fleet touched down on the same tracks and formed an untidy line. Their propellers gradually stopped turning and canopies were pushed upward like the wing casings of insects.

Green-scented air flooded in around Garamond and he relaxed for a moment, enjoying the sensation of being at rest. The luxuriousness of his body's response to the silence awakened memories of what it had been like arriving home for a brief spell after a long mission. Ecstasy-living was a phenomenon well known to S.E.A. personnel, as were its attendant dangers. Rigid self-control was always required during home leave to prevent the ecstasy getting out of control and causing a fierce negative reaction at the beginning of the next mission. But in this instance, as he breathed

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the cool heavy air, Garamond realized he had been tricked into lowering his guard . . .

I can't possibly take another two years of flying night and day, the thought came. *Nobody could.*

"Come on, Vance—stretch the legs," Braunek called as he leaped to the grass. He was followed by Delia Liggett, Ralston and Pierre Tarque, the young medic who completed the crew of No. 1. Garamond waved to them and made himself busy with his straps.

Two whole years to go—at least!—and what would it achieve?

The sounds of laughter and cheerful talk came from outside as the crews of the seven aircraft met and mingled. He could hear friendly punches being swapped, and derisive whoops that probably signified an overlong kiss being exchanged.

Even if I get near enough to the President to kill her, which is most unlikely, what would that achieve? It's too late to do anything for Aileen and Chris. Would they want me to get myself executed?

Garamond stood up, filled with guilty excitement, and climbed out of the glasshouse. From the slight elevation, the alien settlement looked like a dreamy garden village. He glanced around, taking in all the lime-green immensities, and dropped to the ground where Cliff Napier and Denise Serra were waiting for him. Denise greeted him with a warm, direct gaze. She was wearing regulation-issue black trousers, but topped with a tangerine blouse in place of a tunic, and more than ever he appreciated that she was beautiful. They were joined almost at once by O'Hagan and Sammy Yamoto, both of whom looked grayer and older than Garamond had expected. O'Hagan wasted no time on pleasantries.

"We're at a big decision point, Vance," he began. "Five of our ships have sub-standard propeller bearings and if we can't get them upgraded there's no point in continuing with the flight." He tilted his head and assumed the set expression with which he always received arguments.

"I have to agree." Garamond nodded, rediscovering the fact that looking at Denise soothed and delighted his eyes.

O'Hagan twitched his brows in surprise. "All right, then. The first thing we have to do when we meet these aliens is assess their engineering capabilities."

"They can't be at the level of gyromagnetic power or magnetic bearings—you saw their aircraft."

"That's true, but I think I'm right in saying a magnelube bearing can be considerably upgraded by enclosing it within another bearing, even one as primitive as a ball race. All we would have to do is commission the aliens to manufacture twenty or so large conventional bearings that we can wrap around our magnelubes."

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"They'd need to be of a standard size."

O'Hagan sniffed loudly. "That goes without saying."

"I think you'll find . . ." Garamond broke off as an abrupt silence fell over the assembled crews. He turned and saw a fantastic cavalcade approaching from the direction of the city. The aliens were clearly humanoid—and shared the human predilection for covering their bodies with clothes. Predominant hues were yellows and browns that toned in with sand-colored skin, making it difficult to determine precise details of their anatomies. Some of the aliens were on foot, some on bicycles, some on tricycles, some on motorcycles, some in a variety of open and closed cars including a two-wheeled gyro car. Some were perched on an erratic air-cushion vehicle. They approached to within twenty meters of the parked aircraft and came to a halt. As the heterogenous mixture of engines coughed, clanked and spluttered into silence, Garamond became aware that the aliens were producing a soft humming noise of their own. It was a blend of many different notes, continuously inflecting, and he tentatively concluded that it was their mode of speech.

Seen up close, the aliens appeared hairless but had identifiable equivalents of eyes, ears and mouths agreeably positioned on their heads. Garamond was unable to decide what anatomical features their flimsy garments were meant to cover, or to see any evidence of sexual differentation. He felt curiously indifferent to the strangers although this first contact looked infinitely more propitious than the wordless futility marking his encounter with the Clowns. But, to him, no adventure in the outside universe could hold much significance compared to the voyage of discovery he was making within himself.

"Do you want to try speaking with them?" O'Hagan said.

Garamond shook his head. "It's your turn to get your name in the history books, Dennis. Be my guest."

O'Hagan looked gratified. "If it's to be done, best to do it scientifically." He advanced on the nearest of the aliens, who seemed to regard him with interest. The movement of O'Hagan's shoulders showed he was trying to communicate with his hands.

"There's no *need*," Garamond said in a low voice.

Yamoto turned his head. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, Sammy. I was talking to myself."

"You should be careful who you speak to." Yamoto laughed.

Garamond nodded abstractedly. *The thing Dennis O'Hagan doesn't realize about these people is that they'll never do what he wants. He has missed all the signs.*

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All right—assuming we can't get them to make the bearings, is there any point in continuing with the flight? Answer: no. This isn't just a personal reaction. The computers agreed that two airplanes of the type available would not constitute a sufficiently flexible and resourceful transport system. Therefore, I simply can't get back to Beachhead City. It's as clear-cut as that. It always was too late to do anything for Aileen and Chris, and now there's nothing I can even attempt to do.

I've been born again.

THE aliens stayed for more than an hour and then, gradually but without stragglers, moved away in the direction of their city. They reminded Garamond of children who had been enjoying an afternoon at a fair and had become so hungry they could not bear to miss the meal waiting at home. When the last brightly painted vehicle disappeared behind the trees there was a moment of utter silence in the meadow, followed by an explosive release of tension among the plane crews. Bottles of synthetic liquor were produced and a party set off to swim in a nearby lake.

"That was weird," Joe Braunek said, shaking his head. "We stood in two lines and looked at each other like farm boys and girls at a village dance on Terranova."

"It went all right," Garamond assured him. "There's no protocol—what were we supposed to do?"

"It still was weird."

"I know, but just think what it would have been like if there'd been any diplomats or military around. We met them, and stared at them, and they stared at us, and nobody tried to take anything that belonged to the others, and nobody got hurt. Things could have been worse, believe me."

"I guess so. Did you see the way they kept counting our ships?"

"I did notice that." Garamond recalled the repeated gesture among the aliens: long golden fingers indicating, tallying.

"Seemed important to them, somehow. It was as if they'd never seen . . ."

"We've made genuine progress, Vance." O'Hagan approached with a sheaf of hand-written notes and a recorder. "I've identified at least six nouns or noun-sounds in their speech and I believe I'd have done better if I'd had musical training."

"Can't you get somebody to help?"

"Yes. I'm taking Paskuda and Shelley and going into the city. We won't stay long."

"Stay as long as you want," Garamond said casually.

"All right, Vance." O'Hagan gave him a searching glare. "I want to see something of their machine capability as soon as possible. I think that we could get a good idea

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of what's available, don't you?"

"Excellent." Garamond had caught a flash of tangerine farther down the line of aircraft. He quickly disengaged from O'Hagan, walked toward Denise Serra, then hesitated on noticing that she was involved in a discussion with the six other women of the flight crews. He was turning away when she glimpsed him and signaled that he was to wait. A minute later she came to him, looking warm, competent, desirable and everything else he expected a woman to be. The thought of lying with her caused a painful stab in his lower abdomen as glandular mechanisms, too long suppressed, found themselves reactivated. Denise glanced around her, frowned at the proximity of other people, and led the way towards an unspoiled area of tall grass. The quasi-intimacy of her actions pleased Garamond.

"It's good to see you again."

"It's good to see you, Vance. How do you feel now?"

"Better. I'm coming to life again."

"I'm glad." Denise gave him a speculative look. "That was an official meeting of the Orbitsville Women's League, detached chapter."

"Oh? Carry on, Sister Denise."

She smiled briefly. "Vance, they've voted to drop out of the flight."

"Unanimously?"

"Yes. Five airplanes have to give up eventually, and we might as well pick the spot. The Hummers seem friendly, and making a study of their culture will give us something to do. Apart from bringing up babies, that is."

"Do you know how many men will want to stay?"

"Most of them. I'm sorry, Vance."

"Nobody has to apologize for the operation of simple logic."

"But that leaves you only two aircraft, which isn't enough."

"That's all right." Garamond wondered how long he could go on in the role of martyr before telling Denise he had already come to terms with himself.

She caught his hand. "I know how disappointed you must be."

"You're making it easy to take," he said. Denise released his hand instantly and he knew he had said something wrong. He waited impassively.

"Has Cliff not told you I'm having a baby?" Denise's eyes were intent on his. "His baby?"

Garamond forced himself to compose a suitable reply. "He didn't need to."

"You mean he hasn't? Just wait till I get my hands on the big . . ."

"I'm not completely blind, Denise." Garamond produced a smile for her. "I knew as soon as I saw both of you together this morning. I just haven't got around to congratulating him yet."

"Thanks, Vance. Out here we'll

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need all the godfathers we can get."

"Can't help you there, I'm afraid—I'll be a few million kilometers east of here by that time."

"Oh!" Denise looked away from him. "I thought . . ."

"That I was quitting? Not until I'm forced to—and you know better than I do that the computers didn't say two aircraft could not reach Beachhead City. It's just a question of odds, isn't it?"

"So is Russian Roulette."

"I'll see you around, Denise." Garamond turned away, but she caught his arm.

"I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry."

"Forget it." He squeezed her hand before removing it from his arm. "I really am glad that you and Cliff have something good going. Now, please excuse me—I have a lot of work to do."

GARAMOND had been occupied for several hours with the load distribution plans for his two remaining aircraft when darkness came. He switched on the fuselage interior lights and continued working with cold concentration, ignoring the sounds of revelry drifting into the cabin on the evening breeze. His fingers moved continually over the calculator keyboard as he labored through dozens of load permutations, striving to decide the best uses for his payload capability. The brief penumbral twilight had fled when he felt vibrations that told him someone was coming aboard. He looked up and saw O'Hagan squeezing his way toward the small chart-covered table.

"I've just discovered how much I used to rely on computers," Garamond said.

O'Hagan shook his head impatiently. "I've just spent the most fantastic day of my life, and I need a drink to get over it. Where's the supply?" He sat quietly while Garamond found a plastic bottle and handed it to him, then he took a short careful swallow. "This stuff hasn't been aged much."

"The man who made it has."

"Like the rest of us." O'Hagan took another drink and apparently decided he had devoted too much time to preamble. "We haven't got a hope in hell of getting the bearings we need from these people. Know why?"

"Because they've no machine tools?"

"Because they make everything by hand. You knew?"

"I guessed. They've got some airplanes, but no airplane factory or airport. They've got some cars, but no car factory or roads."

"Good work, Vance—you were way ahead on that one." O'Hagan drummed his fingers on the table, the sound large the narrow confines of the cabin, and his voice lost some of its usual incisiveness. "They picked a road entirely different from ours. No specialization of

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labor, no mass production, no standardization. Anybody who wants a car or a cake-mixer builds it from scratch, if he has the time and the talent. You noticed their planes and cars were all different?"

"Yes. I noticed them counting our ships, too."

"So did I, but I didn't know what was going on in their minds. They must have been astonished at seeing seven identical models."

"Not astonished," Garamond said. "Mildly surprised, perhaps. I've a feeling these people haven't much curiosity in their make-up. If you allow only one alien per house, that city out there must have a population of twenty thousand or more. Yet I doubt if as many as two hundred came out to look at us today—and practically all those who came had their own transport."

"You mean we got the lunatic fringe."

"Gadgeteers, anyway—probably more interested in our aircraft than in us. They could be a frustrating bunch to have as next-door neighbors."

O'Hagan stared portentously at the paperwork scattered on the table. "So you intend to press on?"

"Yes." Garamond decided to let the single word do the work of the hundreds he might have used.

"Have you got a crew?"

"I don't know yet."

O'Hagan sighed heavily. "I'm sick to death of flying, Vance. It's killing me. But I'd go crazy if I had to live among folks who keep inventing the steam engine every couple of years. I'll fly with you."

"Thanks, Dennis." Garamond felt a warm prickling in his eyes. "I . . ."

"Never mind the gratitude," O'Hagan said briskly. "Let's see what sort of mess you've been making of these load distributions."

XVIII

AGAINST Garamond's expectations, he was able to raise two crews of four to continue the flight. Again making use of the extra lift to be gained from cold air, the two machines took off at dawn and, without circling or giving any aerial signal of goodbye, they flew quietly into the east.

Day 193. Estimated range: 2,160,000 kilometers

This may be my last journal entry. Words seem to be losing their meaning, the act of writing them all significance. I notice that we have virtually stopped speaking to each other. The silence does not imply or induce separateness—the eight of us have compacted into one. It is simply that there is something embarrassing about watching a man go through the whole pointless performance of shaping his lips and activating his tongue in order to push sound vibrations out on the air. It is peculiar, too, how a spoken word resolves itself into

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meaningless syllables, and how a single syllable can hang resonating in the air, in your mind, long after the speaker has turned away.

I fancy, sometimes, that the same phenomenon takes place with images. We have steered our ships above a thousand seas, ten thousand mountain ranges, all of which have promised to be different—but which all struck us as the same. A distinctive peak or river bend, a curious group of islands, the coloration of a wooded valley—geographical features appear before us with the promise of something new and, having cheated us, fall behind. Were it not for the certainty of the inertial guidance system I might imagine we were flying in circles.

No, that isn't correct, for we have learned to steer a constant course against the stripings of the sky. We seem to exist, embedded, in a huge crystal paperweight and one of the advantages, perhaps the only one, is that we can tell where we are going by reference to its millefiori design. If I hold the milk-blue curvatures in a certain precise relationship, crossing windshield and prow just so, I can fly for as long as thirty minutes before the black box chimes and edges me to left or right. (The other black box, the portable delton detector, remains inert even after all this time. Dennis was right when he said we were lucky to find that first particle so soon.)

The upcurving horizon provides a constant reference for level flying. It occurred to me recently that Orbitsville is so big that we should not be able to detect any upward curvature in the horizon. As usual, Dennis was able to explain that it was an optical illusion—the horizon is virtually straight but, through a trick of perception, appears to sag in the middle. He told me that the ancient Greeks compensated for the effect when building their temples.

The two aircraft are behaving as well as can be expected within their design limits. Each is carrying a reserve powerplant which takes up a high proportion of its payload, but that's unavoidable. A gyromagnetic engine is little more than a block of metal in which most of the atoms have been orchestrated to resonate in tune. It is without doubt one of the best general purpose medium-sized powerplants ever conceived, but it has a fault in that—without warning and for no apparent reason—the orchestra can fall into discord and the power output drop to zero. When that happens there is no option but to install a new engine. We can afford it to happen only twice.

FORTUNATELY we have had only minor mechanical troubles, nothing serious enough to cause an unscheduled landing. But the potential is there and grows daily.

The biggest cause for concern,

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however, is the biological machinery on board—our own bodies.

Everybody except young Braunek is subject to headaches, constipation, dizziness and nausea. Many of the symptoms are probably due to prolonged stress but, with increasingly unreliable aircraft to fly, we dare not resort to tranquilizers. Dennis in particular is causing me alarm, and an equal amount of guilt. I should never have brought him along. He gets grayer and more tired every day, grows less and less able to do his stint at the controls. The protein and yeast cakes on which we live are not appetizing at the best of times, but Dennis is finding it difficult to keep them down. His weight is decreasing rapidly.

I am reaching the conclusion that the mission should be abandoned. This time there are no emotional undertones in my thinking. I simply realize that the gamble is not worth the expenditure of human lives.

A short time ago I could not have made such an admission. But that was before we had fully begun to pay for challenging the Big O. The journey we are attempting is perhaps only a hundredth of O's circumference, and of that tiny fraction we have completed only a fraction. My personal punishment for this presumption is that O has scoured out my soul. I can think of my dead wife and child; I can think of Denise Serra; I can think of Elizabeth Lindstrom . . . and nothing happens. I feel nothing.

This is my last diary entry.

There is nothing more to write. There is nothing more to say.

KNEELING on the thrumming floor beside O'Hagan's bunk, Garamond said, "It's summertime down there, Dennis. We've flown right into summer."

"I don't care." Beneath its covering of sheets, the scientist's body seemed as frail and fleshless as that of a mummified woman.

"I'm positive we could find fruit trees."

O'Hagan gave a skeletal grin. "You know what you can do with your fruit trees."

"But if you could eat something you'd be all right."

"I'm just fine—all I need is a rest." O'Hagan caught Garamond's wrist. "Vance, you're not going to call of the flight on my account. Promise me that."

"I promise." Garamond disengaged the white, too-clean fingers one by one and stood up. The decision, now that it had come, was strangely easy to make. "I'm calling it off on my own account."

He ignored the other man's protests and went forward along the narrow aisle to the blinding arena of the cockpit. Braunek was at the controls, Sammy Yamoto beside him in the second pilot's seat. He had removed a cover from the delton detector and was probing inside

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it. Garamond tapped him on the shoulder.

"Why aren't you asleep, Sammy? You were on duty most of the night."

Yamoto adjusted his dark glasses. "I'm going to bed down in a minute—as soon as I put my mind at rest about this pile of junk."

"Junk?"

"Yes. I don't think it's working."

Garamond glanced at the detector's control panel. "According to the operating light, it's working."

"I know, but look at this." Yamoto clicked the switch of the main power supply to the detector box up and down several times in succession. The orange letters that spelled SYSTEM FUNCTIONING continued to glow steadily in their dark recess.

"What a botch," Yamoto said bitterly. "You know, I might never have caught on if a generator hadn't cut itself out during the night. I was sitting here about two hours later when all of a sudden it hit me—the lights on the detector panel hadn't blinked with all the others."

"Does that prove it isn't working?"

"Not necessarily—but it makes me doubt the quality of the whole assembly. Litman deserves to be shot."

"Don't worry about it." Garamond lowered himself into the supernumerary seat. "Not at this stage. We have to call off the flight."

"Dennis?"

"Yes. It's killing him."

"I don't want to seem callous, but—" Yamoto paused to force a multiconnector into place —"don't you think he may die anyway?"

"I can't take that chance."

"Now I have to sound callous. There are seven other men on this . . ." Yamoto stopped speaking as the delton detector emitted a sharp tap like that of a steel ball dropped onto a metal plate. He instinctively jerked his hand away from the exposed wiring.

Garamond raised his eyebrows. "What have you done to it?"

"All I've done is fix it." Yamoto gave a quivering, triumphant grin as two more tapping sounds were heard almost simultaneously.

"Then what are those noises?"

"Those, my friend, are delta particles coming through our screen." The astronomer's words were punctuated by further noises from the machine. "And their frequency indicates we're close to their source."

"Close? How close?"

Yamoto took out a calculator and his fingers flickered over it. "I'd say about twenty or thirty thousand kilometers."

A cool breeze from nowhere played on Garamond's forehead. "You don't mean from Beachhead City."

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"Beachhead City is the only source we know. That's what it's all about."

"But . . ." A fresh staccato outburst came from the detector as Garamond, knowing he should have been excited, looked out through the front windshield of the aircraft at a range of low mountains perhaps an hour's flying time ahead. They seemed no more and no less familiar than all the others he had seen.

"Is this possible?" he said. "Could we have overestimated the flight time by two years?"

Yamoto turned an adjusting screw on the delton detector, decreasing the sound level of its irregular tattoo. "Anything is possible on Orbitsville."

IT WAS late on the following day when the two stiff-winged ungainly birds began to gain altitude to cross the final green ridges. All crew members, including a feverish-eyed O'Hagan, were gathered to watch as the mountain crests began to sink in submission to their combined wills. Changing parallaxes made the high ground below them appear to shift like sand.

Yamoto switched off the detector's incessant pelting with a flourish. "The instrument is no longer of any use to us. Astronomically speaking, we have reached our destination."

"How far would you say it is, Sammy?"

"A hundred kilometers. Perhaps less."

Joe Braunek squirmed in his seat, but his hands and feet were steady on the flying controls. "Then we have to see Beachhead City as soon as we clear this range."

Garamond felt the conviction which had been growing in him achieve a leaden solidity. "It won't be there," he announced. "I don't remember seeing a mountain range this close to the city."

"It's a pretty low range," Yamoto said uncertainly. "You wouldn't have noticed it unless you had a specific . . ."

His voice faded as the ground tilted and sloped away beneath them to reveal one of Orbitsville's mind-stilling prairies. In the hard clean light of the sun they could see to the edges of infinity, across oceans of grass and scrub, and there was no sign of Beachhead City.

"What do we do now?" Braunek spoke with a curious timidity as he looked back at the other three men. The resilience that all the months of flight had not been able to sap now seemed to have left him. "Do we just fly on?"

Garamond, unable to feel shock or disappointment, turned to Yamoto. "Switch on the detector again."

"Right." The astronomer reactivated the black box and the cabin immediately filled with a roar like drum-roll. "But we can't change

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what it says—we're right on target."

"Is it directional?"

"Yes." Yamoto glanced at O'Hagan, who nodded tiredly in confirmation. "Swing to the left," Garamond told Braunek. "Not too quickly." The plane banked slowly to the north and, as it did so, the sound from the delton detector steadily decreased until it faded out altogether.

"Hold it there! We're now flying at right angles to the precise source of the particle bombardment."

Yamoto raised the binoculars and looked in the direction indicated by the aircraft's starboard wing. "It's no use, Vance. There's nothing there."

"There has to be something. We've got an hour of daylight left—take a new bearing and we'll follow it till nightfall."

While Yamoto used the light-phone to bring the second crew up to date on what was happening, Joe Braunek steered the aircraft into its new heading and shed height until they were at cruise altitude. The two machines flew on for another hour, occasionally swinging off course to make an up-dated check on their direction. Toward the end of the hour, O'Hagan's strength gave out and he had to be helped back to his bunk.

"We messed it up," he said to Garamond, easing himself down.

Garamond shook his head as he spread a blanket over the older man's thin body. "It wasn't your fault."

"Our basic premise was wrong, and that's unforgivable."

"Forget it, Dennis. Besides, you were the one who warned me we had no right to pick up that first particle so soon. As usual, you were right."

"Don't try to butter me. I'm too . . ." O'Hagan closed his eyes and seemed to fall asleep at once.

Garamond made his way back to the cockpit and sat down to weigh the various factors pointing to the ending of the mission. He sensed that the resistance of the other men, which had surprised him earlier, would no longer be a consideration. They had allowed themselves to hope too soon, and Orbitsville had punished them for it. What remained now was the decision on where to make the final landing.

His own preference was for the foothills of a mountain chain which would provide them with rivers, variety of vegetation and the psychologically important richness of scenery. It might be best to turn back to the range they had just crossed rather than fly onward over what seemed the most extensive plain they had encountered so far. There was the possibility that something could go wrong with one of the aircraft when they were part way across that eternity of grass; and there was the certainty that what they would find on the far side would be no different from what

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they had left behind. Unless they came to a sea, Garamond reminded himself. A sea would add even more . . .

"I think we've arrived," Braunek called over his shoulder. "I see something in front of us."

Garamond moved up behind the pilot and peered through the forward canopy at the flat prairie. It stretched ahead, unbroken, for hundreds of kilometers. "I don't see anything."

"Straight ahead of us. About ten kilometers."

"Is it something small?"

"Small? It's huge! Look, Vance, right there!"

Garamond followed the exact line of Braunek's pointing finger and a cold unease crept over him as he confirmed his belief that they were looking at featureless flatlands.

Yamoto shouldered his way into the cockpit. "What's going on?"

"Straight ahead of us," Braunek said. "What do you think that is?"

The astronomer shielded his eyes to see better and gave a low whistle. "I don't know, but it would be worth landing for a closer look. But before we go down I want to get an infrared photograph of it."

Garamond examined the sand-smooth plain once more, and was opening his mouth to protest when he saw the apparition. He had been looking for an object which distinguished itself from its surroundings by verticality and texture, but this was a vast area of grass that differed from the rest only in that it was slightly darker in color. It could have been taken for a natural variation in the grass, perhaps caused by soil composition, except for the fact that it was perfectly circular. From the approaching aircraft it appeared as a ghostly ellipse of green on green, like a design in an experimental painting. Yamoto opened his personal locker, took out a camera and photographed the slowly expanding circle. He reeled out the print, glanced at it briefly and passed it around for the others to see. On it the area of grass stood out darkly against an orange background.

"It's quite a few degrees colder," Yamoto said. "I would say that the entire area seems to be losing heat into space."

"What does it mean?"

"Well, the grass there is of a slightly different color—which could mean the soil is absorbing some mineral or other. And there's the heat loss. Plus the fact that radiation from the outside universe is being admitted . . . It adds up to just one thing."

"Which is?"

"We've found another entrance to Orbitsville."

"How can that be?" Garamond felt a slow unexpected quickening of his spirit. "We did a survey of the equatorial region from the outside, and besides . . . there's no hole in the shell."

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"There is a hole," Yamoto said calmly. "But—a very long time ago—somebody sealed it up."

They landed close to the edge of the circle. Although darkness came flooding in from the east only a few minutes later, they began to dig an exploratory trench. The soil was several meters thick in the area, but in less than an hour an invisible syrupy resistance to their spades told them they had encountered the lenticular field. A short time later a massive diaphragm of rusting metal was uncovered. They sliced through it with the invisible lance of a valency cutter.

They levered out a square section. Then, without speaking, each man in turn looked downward at the stars.

XIX

"THIS is North Ten, the most advanced of our forward distribution centers," Elizabeth Lindstrom said, a warm note of pride in her voice. "You can see at once the amount of effort and organization that has been put into it."

Charles Devereaux walked to the parapet of the roof of the administration building and looked out across the plain. Four hundred kilometers to the south lay Beachhead City. The arrow-straight highway to it was alive with the small wheeled transports of settlers. Here and there on the road, before it faded into the shimmering distance, could be seen the larger shapes of bulk carriers bringing supplies. The highway ended at North Ten, from which point a series of dirt tracks fanned out into the encircling sweep of prairie. For the first few kilometers the tracks made their way through an industrial area where reaping machines gathered the grass used as a source of cellulose to produce plastics for building purposes. Immediately beyond the acetate factories, the homesteads began. The widely spaced dwellings sparkled whitely in the sun.

"I'm impressed with everything Starflight has done here, My Lady," Devereaux said, choosing his words with professional care. "Please understand that when I pose questions to you, I do so solely in my capacity as a representative of the Two Worlds Government."

Do you think I would waste time answering them otherwise? Elizabeth suppressed the thought and bent her mind to the unfamiliar task of self-control. "I do understand," she assured the dapper gray man, smiling. "It's your duty to make sure that all that can possibly be done to open up Lindstromland is in fact being done."

"That's precisely it, My Lady. You see, the people on Earth and Terranova have heard about the fantastic size of Lindstromland. They can't understand why it is that, if there is unlimited living space available, the Government doesn't simply set up a program of shipbuilding on a global scale and

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bring them here," said Devereaux.

"A perfectly understandable point of view." Elizabeth spread her hands to the horizons, fingers flashing with jewel-fire. "But this land I have given to humanity makes its own rules and we have no option but to abide by them. Lindstromland is unthinkably large. Yet by providing only one entrance, and placing restrictions on interior travel and communications, its builders have effectively made it small. My own belief is that they decided to enforce a selection procedure. As long as Lindstromland can accept immigrants only in regulated quantities the quality of the stock that arrives will be higher."

"Do you think the concept of stock and breeding would have been familiar to them?"

"Perhaps not." Elizabeth realized she had used an unfortunate trigger-word, one to which the upstart of a civil servant reacted unfavorably. It struck her that things had already gone too far when she, President of Starflight, was being forced to placate an obscure official in the weakest government in human history. The circumstances surrounding the discovery of Lindstromland, she was beginning to appreciate, had been ill omens.

Devereaux apparently was not satisfied. "It would be a tragedy if Earth were to export attitudes such as nationalism and . . ."

"What I'm saying," Elizabeth cut in, "is that it would be an even bigger tragedy if we were to empty every slum and gutter on Earth into this green land."

"Why?" Devereaux met her eyes squarely and she made the discovery that his grayness had a steely quality. "Because the transportation task would be too great to be handled by private concern?"

Elizabeth felt her mouth go dry as she fought to restrain herself. Nobody had ever been allowed to speak to her in this manner before, with the possible exception of Captain Garamond—and he had paid. It was infuriating how these small men, nonentities, tended to lapse into insolence the moment they felt secure.

"Of course not," she said, marveling at the calmness of her voice. "There are many sound reasons for regulating population flow. Look at the squalid difficulties there were when the first settlers here encountered those creatures they call Clowns."

"Yes, but those difficulties could have been avoided. In fact, we think they may have been engineered."

For one heady moment Elizabeth considered burning Devereaux in two where he stood, even if it led to a major incident, even if it meant turning Lindstromland into a fortress. Then it came to her that he—in abandoning all the rules of normal diplomacy—was laying his cards on the table. She regarded

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him closely, trying to decide if he were offering himself for sale. The approach, in greatly modified form, was a familiar one among government employees: show yourself to be dangerous and therefore valuable in proportion. She smiled and moved closer to Devereaux, deliberately stepping inside his proximity rejection zone, a psychological maneuver she had learned at an early age. His face stiffened momentarily, as she had known it would, and she was about to touch him when Secretary Robard appeared on the edge of the stairwell. He was carrying a headset and feeding wire out of a reel as he walked.

Elizabeth frowned at him. "What is this, Robard?"

"Priority One, My Lady. Your flagship is picking up a radio message you must hear."

"Wait there." She moved away from Devereaux. The brusqueness of her man's voice, so out of keeping with his normal manner, told her something important had happened. She silently cursed the obtuse physics of Lindstromland that denied her easy radio contact with the outside universe. A voice was already speaking when she put on the headset. It was unemotional, with an inhuman steadiness, and the recognition of it drained the strength from her legs. Elizabeth Lindstrom sank to her knees, and listened.

". . . using the resources of the *Bissendorf's* workshops, we built a number of aircraft in which to fly back to Beachhead City. The ships proved inadequate for the distance involved, but they got eight of us to the point from which I am making this broadcast. We have discovered here a second entrance to the sphere.

"The entrance was not discovered during the equatorial survey because it is sealed with a metal diaphragm. The metal employed has nothing in common with the material of the Orbitsville shell. I believe it is the product of a civilization no further advanced than our own. We had no difficulty cutting a hole in it to let us extend a radio antenna."

There was a crackling pause, then the voice emerged strongly in its relentless measured tones.

"The fact that we were able to find a second entrance so quickly, with such limited resources, probably means there must be many others. Many hundreds. Many thousands, possibly. It is logical to assume that all the others have been similarly blocked, and it is equally logical to assume that the blocking was not done by the builders of the sphere.

"This raises questions about the identity and motivation of those who sealed the entrances. The evidence suggests that the work was carried out by a race of beings who found Orbitsville long before we did. We may never know what those beings looked like, but we

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can tell that they shared some of the faults of our own race. They, or some of them, decided to monopolize Orbitsville, to control it, to exploit it; and the method they chose was to limit access to the interior of the sphere.

"The evidence also shows that they succeeded for a time—and that, eventually, they failed.

"Perhaps they were destroyed in the battle we know to have taken place at the Beachhead City entrance. Perhaps in the end they lost out to Orbitsville itself. By being absorbed and changed, just as we are going to be absorbed and changed. The lesson for us now is that the entire Starflight organization—with its vested interest in curbing humanity's natural expansion—must be cast aside. All of Orbitsville is open to us. It is available as I speak . . ."

Elizabeth removed the headset, cutting herself off from the dreadful, didactic voice. She put her hands on the smooth surface of the roof and sank down until she was lying prone, her open mouth pressed against the footprinted plastic.

Vance Garamond, she thought, her mind sinking through successive levels of cryogenic coldness. *I have to love you . . . because you are the only one ever to have given me real pain, ever to have hurt me. You hurt me now.* She moved her hips from side to side, grinding against the roof with her pubis. *Now that all else is ending . . . it is my turn . . . to make love . . . to you . . .*

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"My Lady, are you ill?" The voice reached her across bleak infinities. Elizabeth raised her head and, with effort, identified the gray, anxious face of Charles Devereaux. She got to her feet.

"How dare you!" she said coldly. "What are you suggesting?"

"Nothing. I . . ."

"Why did you let this person enter my quarters?" Elizabeth turned and stared accusingly at Robard, who had quietly retrieved the headset and was reeling in the attached wire. "Get him out of here!"

"I'm going—I've seen enough." Devereaux hurried toward the stairwell. Elizabeth watched him go, twisting a ruby ring on her finger as she did so. It turned easily on bearings of perspiration.

Robard bowed nervously. "If you will excuse me . . ."

"Not yet," Elizabeth snapped.

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"Get me Doctor Killops on that thing."

"Yes, My Lady." Robard murmured into the instrument, listened for a moment, then handed it to her. He began to withdraw but she pointed at a spot nearby, silently ordering him to stay.

Elizabeth raised the communicator to her lips. "Tell me, Doctor Killops, has Mrs. Garamond had her sedative today yet? No? Then don't give it to her. Captain Garamond is returning, alive, and we want his wife to be fully conscious and alert for the reunion." She threw down the instrument and Robard stooped to pick it up.

"Never mind that," Elizabeth said quietly. "Get my car ready to leave in five minutes. I have urgent business in Beachhead City."

THE shock of hearing by radio that his wife and son were still alive had stormed through Garamond's system like a nuclear fireball. In its wake had come relief, joy, gratitude, bafflement, renewal of optimism—and finally, as a consequence of emotional overload, an intense physical reaction. There was a period of several hours during which he experienced cold sweats, irregular heartbeat and dizziness; and the symptoms were at their height when the little transit boat from fleet headquarters arrived underfoot.

As had happened once before, he felt disoriented and afraid on seeing a spacesuited figure clamber upward through a black hole in the ground. The figure was followed by others carrying empty spacesuits. When the faceplates had been removed and the two parties were mingling, they still looked strange to him. At some time in the preceding months he had come to accept the thin-shouldered shabbiness of his own crew as the norm, and now the members of the rescue party seemed too sleek and shiny, too alien.

"Captain Garamond?" A youthful Starflight officer approached him and saluted, beardless face glowing with pleasure and health. "I'm Lieutenant Kenny of the *Westmorland.* This is a great honor for me, sir."

"Thank you." The action of returning the salute felt awkward to Garamond.

Kenny's gaze strayed to the sloping stiff-winged outlines of the two aircraft and his jaw sagged. "I'm told you managed to fly a couple of million kilometers in those makeshifts. That must have been fantastic."

Garamond suppressed an illogical resentment. "You might call it that. The *Westmorland?* Isn't that Hugo Schilling's command?"

"Captain Schilling insisted on coming with us. He's waiting for you aboard the transit boat now. I'll have to photograph those airplanes, sir—they're just to . . ."

"Not now, Lieutenant. My Chief

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Science Officer is ill and must be hospitalized at once. The rest of us aren't in great shape, either." Garamond tried to keep his voice firm even though a numbness had enveloped his body, creating a sensation that his head was floating in the air like a balloon.

Kenny, with a flexibility of response that further dismayed Garamond, was instantly solicitous. He began shouting orders and within a few minutes the eight members of the *Bissendorf's* crew had been suited up for transfer to the waiting boat. Garamond's mind was brimming with thoughts of Aileen and Chris as he negotiated the short spacewalk, with its swaying vistas of star rivers and its constrained breathing of rubber-smelling air. As soon as he had passed through the airlock he made his way to the forward compartment, which seemed impossibly roomy after his months in the aircraft's narrow fuselage. Another spacesuited figure rose to greet him.

"It's good to see you, Vance," Hugo Schilling said. He was a blue-eyed, silver-haired man who had been in the Exploration Arm for twenty years and treated his job of wandering unknown space as if he was the pilot of a local ferry.

"Thanks, Hugo. It's good to . . ." Garamond shook his head to show he had run out of words.

Schilling inspected him severely. "You don't look well, Vance. Rough trip?"

"Rough trip."

"Enough said, skipper. We're keeping the suits on, but strap yourself in and relax—we'll have you home in no time. Try to get some sleep."

Garamond nodded gratefully. "Have you seen my wife and boy?"

"No. Unlike you, I'm just a working flickerwing man and I don't get invited out to the Octagon."

"The Octagon! What are they doing there?"

"They've been staying with the President ever since you . . . ah . . . disappeared. They're celebrities too, you know. Reflected glory, and all that."

"But . . ." A new center of coldness began to form within Garamond's body. "Tell me, Hugo, did the President send you here to pick us up?"

"No. It was an automatic reaction on the part of Fleet Command. The President is out at North Ten—that's one of the forward supply depots we've built."

"Will she have heard my first message yet?"

"Probably." Schilling pointed a gloved finger at Garamond. "Starting to sweat over some of those things you said about Starflight? Don't worry about it—we all know you've been under a strain. You can say you got a bit carried away by the occasion."

Garamond took a deep breath. "Are there any airplanes or other

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rapid transport systems in use around Beachhead City?"

"Not yet. All the production has been concentrated on ground cars and housing."

"How long will it take the President to get back to the Octagon?"

"It's hard to say—the cars they produce aren't built for speed. Eight hours, maybe."

"How long till we get back?"

"Well, I'm allowing five hours in view of Mister O'Hagan's condition."

"Speed it up, Hugo," Garamond said. "I have to be back before the President, and she's had a few hours start."

Schilling glanced at the information panel on which changing color configurations showed that the ship was sealed and almost ready for flight. "That would mean fairly high G-forces. For a sick man . . ."

"He won't mind—go ask him."

"I don't see . . ."

"Suppose I said it was a matter of life or death?"

"I wouldn't believe you, but..." Schilling winked reassuringly, opened an audio channel to the flight deck, and instructed the pilot to make the return journey in the shortest possible time consistent with O'Hagan's health. Garamond thanked him and tried to relax in the G-chair, wishing he had been able to take the other man into his confidence. Schilling was kindly and uncomplicated, with a high regard for authority. It would have been difficult, possibly disastrous, for Garamond to try telling him he believed Elizabeth Lindstrom was a psychopath who would enjoy murdering an innocent woman and child. Schilling might counter by asking why Elizabeth had not done it as soon as she had had the chance, and Garamond would not have been able to answer. It would not have been enough to say that he felt it in his bones. He closed his eyes as the acceleration forces clamped down, but his growing conviction of danger made it impossible for him to rest. Thirty minutes into the flight he got an idea.

"Do you think there'll be a reception when we get back? A public one?"

"Bound to be," Schilling said. "You keep hogging the news. Even while you were away a reporter called Mason, I think, ran a campaign to persuade somebody to go looking for your ship. The betting was ten thousand-to-one that you were dead, though, so he didn't have much success."

Garamond had forgotten about the reporter from Earth. "You said my wife and boy are well known, too. I want them to meet me at the Beachhead City transit tube. Can you arrange that?"

"I don't see why not. There's a direct communications link to the Octagon from the President's flagship." Schilling spoke into the

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command microphone of his spacesuit, waited, spoke again, and then settled into a lengthy conversation. Only occasional whispers of sound came through his open faceplate, but Garamond could hear the exchange becoming heated. When it had finished Schilling sat perfectly still for a moment before turning to speak.

"Sorry, Vance."

"What happened?"

"Apparently the President has sent instructions from North Ten that your family is to wait in the Octagon until you get there. She's on her way there now, and they can't contact her, so nobody would authorize transportation into the City for your wife. I don't understand it."

"I think I do," Garamond replied quietly, his eyes fixed on the forward view plate and its image of a universe divided in two by the cosmic hugeness of Orbitsville, one half in light, the other in total darkness.

THE effort of moving under multiple gravities was almost too much for Garamond, but he was standing in the cramped airlock—sealed up and breathing suit air—before the transit boat reached the docking clamps. He cracked the outer seal the instant the green disembarkation light came on, went through the boat's outer door and found himself in a lighted I-shaped tube. It was equipped with handrails and, at the rounded corner where the sphere's gravitation came into effect, there was the beginning of a non-skid walkway.

Garamond pulled himself along the weightless section with his hands, forced his way through the invisible syrup of the lenticular field, achieved an upright position and strode into the arrival hall. He was immediately walled in by faces and bodies and, as soon as he opened his helmet, battered by the sound of shouting and cheering. People surged around him, reaching for his hands, slapping his back, pulling hoses and connectors from his suit for souvenirs.

At the rear of the crowd were men with scene recorders. As he scanned their faces, an uncontrollable impulse caused Garamond to raise his arm like a Twentieth Century astronaut returning from an orbital mission. He cursed the autonomous limb, appalled at its behavior, and concentrated on finding the right face in the bewildering, seething mass, aware of how much he had always depended on Cliff Napier in similar circumstances. There was a high proportion of men in the uniforms of top-ranking Starflight officials, any of whom could have arranged transport to the Octagon, but he had no way of knowing which were members of Elizabeth's inner cadre and therefore hostile. After a blurred moment he saw a heavy-shouldered young man with pre-

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maturely graying hair working his way toward him. Colbert Mason!

"Captain Garamond," Mason shouted above the background noise. "I can't tell you how much . . ."

Garamond shook his head. "We can talk later. Have you a car?"

"It's outside."

"I've got to get out of here right now."

Mason hesitated. "There's official Starflight transportation waiting."

"Remember the first day we met, Colbert? You needed wheels in a hurry and I . . ."

"Come on." Mason lowered his head and charged through the crowd like an ice-breaking ship. Garamond, hampered by the bulk of the suit, struggled in his wake. In a few moments they had reached a white vehicle with TWO WORLDS NEWS AGENCY blazoned on its side in orange letters. The two men got in, watched by the retinue that had followed them from the hall, and Mason got the vehicle moving.

"Where to?" he asked.

"The Octagon—as fast as this thing will go."

"Okay, but I'm not welcome there. The guards won't let my car in."

"I'm not welcome either, but we're going in just the same." Garamond began working on the zips of the spacesuit.

That was a good line to hand the Press, he thought as the yammerings of panic began to build up. *That was an authentic general-purpose man of action speaking. Why do I do these things? Why don't I let him know I'm scared shitless? It might makes things easier . . .*

Mason hunched over the wheel as the car sped through the industrial environs of the city. "This is the part you flattened, but they rebuilt it just as ugly as ever."

"They would."

"Can you tell me what's going on?"

Garamond hesitated. "Sorry, Colbert—not yet."

"I just wondered."

"Either way, you're going to get another big story."

"Hell, I know that much already. I just wondered . . . as a friend."

"I appreciate the friendship, but I can't talk till I'm sure."

"It's all right," Mason said. "We'll be there in less than ten minutes."

For the rest of the drive Garamond concentrated on removing the spacesuit. In the confines of the car it was an exhausting, frustrating task which he welcomed because it enabled his mind to hold back the tides of fear. By the time he had finally worked himself free, the octagonal building housing Starflight Center loomed on a hilltop straight ahead. He could make out the perimeter fence with its strolling guards. As the car gained height, and greater stretches of the surrounding grasslands came into

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view, Garamond saw that there was also a northern approach road to the Octagon. Another vehicle, still several kilometers away, was speeding along it, trailing a plume of saffron dust. It was too far away for him to distinguish the black-and-white silver Starflight livery, but on the instant a steel band seemed to clamp around his chest, denying him air. He stared wordlessly at the massive gate of the west entrance. The car slowed down as guards emerged from their kiosk.

"Go straight through it;" Garamond urged. "Don't slow down."

Mason said, "It would take a tank to batter down that gate—we'd both be killed. We'll just have to talk our way in."

"Talk?" Garamond looked north and saw that the other vehicle seemed to be approaching with the speed of an aircraft. "There's no time for talking."

HE LEAPED from the car as soon as it had slid to a halt and ran to the kiosk door at the side of the gate. A sun-visored guard emerged, carrying a ray gun, and stared warily at Garamond's stained travesty of a Starlight uniform.

"State your business," he said, at the same time making a signal to the other two guards seated inside.

"I'm Captain Garamond of the Stellar Exploration Arm. Open the gate immediately."

The man's mouth fell open.

"I don't know if I can do that, even for you, Captain Garamond."

"You've heard of me, haven't you? You know who I am?"

"I do know who you are, Captain. I—I think you're the greatest! But that doesn't mean I should let you in. Have you an authorization?"

"Authorization?" Garamond considered putting on a display of righteous indignation, but decided it would not work. He smiled and pointed at the dust-devil now within a kilometer of the northern gate. "There's my authorization. President Lindstrom is in that car, coming here especially to meet me."

"How do I know that's true? I mean—"

"You'll know when she finds out you wouldn't let me through. I think I'll go back to my car and watch what happens." Garamond turned away.

"Just a minute." The guard gave Garamond a perplexed look. "You can come in, but that other guy stays where he is."

Garamond shrugged and walked straight at the gate. It rolled out of his way just in time, then he was inside the perimeter and heading for the Octagon's west entrance door, not more than a hundred paces away. A second before it was lost to view behind the flank of the building, he glimpsed the other car arriving at the north gate. It was black and silver, and he was able to see a pale feminine figure in the shaded interior. The certainty of

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being too late made his heart lapse into an unsteady, lumping rhythm. He was breaking into a run, regardless of what the watchful patrolmen might think, when his attention was caught by a flicker of movement as a window opened in the transparent wall of the uppermost floor. Again he picked out a womanly figure, but this time it was that of his wife. And she was looking down at him.

He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted. "Aileen! Can you hear me?"

"Vance!" Her voice was faint and tremulous, almost lost in the updraft at the sheer wall.

"Pick up Chris and bring him down to this door as fast as you can." He indicated the nearby entrance. "Did you get that?"

"Yes—I'm coming down."

Aileen vanished from the window. Garamond went to the door, held it open and saw a short, deserted corridor with four openings on each side. He debated trying to find stairs or elevator shaft, then decided that if he tried to meet Aileen part way he might miss her. Elizabeth was bound to be in the building by this time and on her way up to the private suite. Aileen and Christopher should be on their way down. But suppose there were only one central stairwell and they met Elizabeth head on? Garamond entered a chill dimension of time in which entire galaxies were created and destroyed between each thunderous beat of his heart. He tried to think constructively, but all that was left to him was the ability to be afraid, to feel pain and terror and . . .

One of the corridor doors burst open. He caught a flash of brown skin and multicolored silks, then Aileen was in his arms. *We've made it,* Garamond exulted. *We're all going to live.*

"Is it really you?" Aileen's face was cool and tear-wet against his own. "Is it really you, Vance?"

"Of course, darling. There's no time to talk now. We've got to get . . ." Garamond's voice was stilled as he made the discovery. "Where's Chris?"

Aileen looked at him blankly. "He's upstairs in his bed. He was asleep . . ."

"But I told you to bring him!"

"Did you? I can't think . . ." Aileen's eyes widened. "What's wrong?"

"She's gone up there to get Chris. I told you to . . ." Voices sounded behind him and Garamond's hunting eyes saw that two guards had followed him nearly to the entrance. They had stopped and were looking up at the building. Holding Aileen by the wrist, Garamond ran to them and turned. High up within the transparent wall, where Aileen had been a minute earlier, Elizabeth Lindstrom was standing, pearly abdomen pressed against the clear plastic. She stared down, screened by

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reflected clouds, and raised one arm in langorous triumph.

Garamond rounded on the nearest guard and, with a single convulsive movement, snatched the gun from his shoulder and sent him sprawling. He thumbed the safety catch off, selected maximum power and raised the weapon—just in time to see Elizabeth step backward away from the wall, into shelter. Garamond's eyes triangulated on his wife's ashen face.

"Is the kid's room on this side of the building?"

"Yes. I . . ."

"Where is it? Show me the exact place."

Aileen pointed at a wall section two meters to the left of where Elizabeth had been standing. The fallen guard got to this feet and came forward with outstretched hands, while his companion stood by uncertainly. Garamond pointed at the power setting on the rifle, showing it to be at the lethal maximum. The guard backed off, shaking his head. Garamond raised the weapon again, aimed carefully and squeezed the trigger. The needle-fine laser ray pierced the transparent plastic and, as he swung the gun, took out an irregular smoking area that tumbled flashing to the ground.

A second later, as Garamond had prayed, a small pajama-clad figure appeared in the opening. Christopher Garamond rubbed his eyes, peering sleepily into space. Garamond dropped the rifle and ran forward, waving his arms.

"Jump, Chris. Jump!" The sound of his hoarse, frightened voice almost obliterated the thought: *He won't do it; nobody would do it.* "Come on, son—I'll catch you."

Christopher drew back his shoulders. A pale shape appeared behind him, grasping. Christopher jumped cleanly through the opening, into sunlit air.

As had happened once before, on a quiet terrace on Earth, Garamond saw the childish figure falling and turning, falling and turning, faster and faster. As had happened once before, he found himself running in a slow-motion nightmare, wading, struggling through molasses-thick tides of air. He sobbed his despair as he lunged forward.

Something solid and incredibly weighty hit him on the upper chest, tried to smash his arms from their sockets. He went down into dusty grass, rolling with the priceless burden locked against his body. From a corner of his eye he saw a flash of laser fire stab downward and expire harmlessly. Garamond stood up, treasuring the feel of the boy's arms locked around his neck.

"All right, son?" he whispered. "All right?"

Christopher nodded and pressed his face into Garamond's shoulder, clinging like a baby. Garamond estimated he was beyond the effective

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range of Elizabeth's ring weapons and ran toward the gate without looking back at the Lindstrom Center. Aileen, who had been standing with her hands over her mouth, ran with him until they had reached the perimeter. The guards, frozen within their kiosk, watched them with uncomprehending eyes. Colbert Mason was standing beside his car holding up a scene recorder. He glanced at a dial on the side of the machine.

"That took two minutes less fifteen seconds," he said admiringly, then kissed the recorder ecstatically. "And it was all good stuff."

"The best is yet to come," Garamond assured him, as they crowded into the car.

GARAMOND, *made sensitive to the nature of the benevolent trap, never again went far into the interior of Orbitsville.*

Not even when Elizabeth Lindstrom had been deposed and removed from all contact with society; not even when the Starflight enterprise had made way for communal transport schemes as natural and all-embracing as the yearly migration of birds to warmer climes; not even when geodesic networks of commerce were stretched across the outer surface of Orbitsville.

He chose to live with his family on the edges of space, from which viewpoint he could best observe, and also forget, that time was drawing to a close for the rest of humanity.

Time is a measurement of change. Evolution is a product of competition. Those concepts were without meaning or relevance in the context of the Big O. Absolved of the need to fight or flee, to feel hunger or fear, to build or destroy, to hope or dream, humanity soon was to cease being human—even though the metamorphosis would not take place within a single season.

During Garamond's lifetime there was a last flare-up of that special kind of organized activity which, had man not been drawn like a wasp into the honeypot, might have enabled his descendants to straddle the universe. There was a magical period when, centered on a thousand star-pools, a thousand new nations were born. All of them felt free to develop and flower in their own separate ways, but all were destined to become as one under the influence of Orbitsville's changeless savannahs.

In time even the flickerwing ships ceased to ply the trade lanes between the entrance portals, because there can be no reward for the traveler when departure point cannot be distinguished from destination.

The quiet of that last long Sunday fell over an entire region of space.

Orbitsville had achieved its purpose. ★

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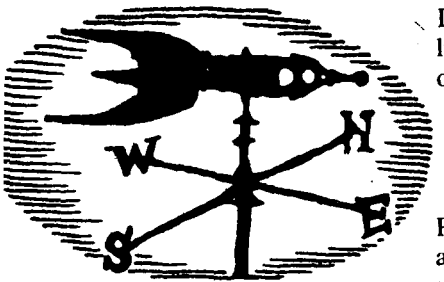

DIRECTIONS

Gentlemen:

In today's mail I received the February 1974 issue of *Galaxy*. This is the first copy that I have received in over eight months. My subscription expired in October of 1973 and I wish it to remain that way.

Perhaps Science has caught up with the Science-fiction writers or perhaps it is me that has changed but it seems to me that the quality of the stories has deteriorated to the extent that I have given up on them.

Perhaps the writers (good ones, that is) have either passed on or became too affluent. Where are the stories about Retief, Van Ryn, the Star Trader, the Rim Worlds, Stellar Colonization and etc.

You are not the only one to feel my axe. I have been a subscriber to *Analog* ever since it started as *'Astounding'* but as of this August, I am cancelling for the reasons given above.

My only reason for stating this as I have is, perhaps it will build a little fire under someone that someone else will benefit.

Sincerely
Myrum J. Mudgett

P.S. In case you are wondering, I am 76 years of age and started reading Science Fiction in 1930—a magazine put out by Hugo Gernsback.

MJM

Since writing the above I have read *The Man Who Killed Hope'*. This is a good example of what I mean. That story would have better been put in Readers Digest Book of the Month Club. More about lawyers than Science Fiction. MJM

As the new editor I am taking the liberty of sending you copies of June Galaxy *and* Worlds of IF *in the hopes that you will be pleasantly surprised. I agree—sf has been better. But it is my firm belief that—certainly in this magazine!—it will soon be better than ever!*

3515 Mary
Park City, Ill. 60085
April 23, 1974

Dear Mr. Baen,

At last, a decent science column. *Galaxy* can only benefit from A Step Farther Out, and I can think

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of no one better qualified than Jerry Pournelle to write it. The man has a natural talent for putting across complex ideas in a form that excites and awes the reader. I personally would rather read his non-fiction than his fiction.

I hesitate to say that, as I am fond of his fiction, but it's difficult to find an author who can respond to my cravings for good science articles. Perhaps I represent a minority group, I don't know.

Recently I learned you have taken over as editor at *Galaxy*. (Best wishes.) Since the science column is a new addition, I feel a need to urge you to keep it, and I'd like to tell you why.

Although I can speak only for myself, it should be safe to say your readers are more than casually interested in science. I would hazard a guess that most of the science and technology books of the popular variety are sold to sf readers. But beyond these books there are very few sources for a reader to turn toward. *'Popular Science'*, *'Science Digest'*, and the like are apt to focus on readers with little interest in basic science. Instead they publish reports on the latest innovations from Detroit or articles of the Sunday supplement variety.

While this is fine for the general public, I don't think it satisfies the average fan. He is already aware of most of the material these magazines print. But when he turns to find a more informative source, he has to make a standing broad jump into the technical journals. Now, most fans can follow these, I'm sure, but the journals are too pointed, too limited in scope to be really satisfying.

Thus, I strongly believe there is a demand among your readership for a middleground. Also, I think that after the column has been established your readers would look forward to it as much as the stories. (Especially a column in the hands of Dr. Pournelle.) There are other advantages — the association of good sf with hard science, a column the readers can anchor to in each issue, a sounding board for new ideas in the real world.

Having gone this far, I'd also like to point out some of the things I'd like to see, and some I wouldn't.

First, historicals of the Asimov variety. Before I cut Isaac's column, let me praise it. Here is an example of the success a science column can produce. Certainly, Isaac's column has been good for F&SF. I also buy that particular magazine, and the first thing I read in it is the science column. Perhaps it's because of long association, but I'm always confident that, even if the fiction doesn't do a lot for me in this particular issue, my money has not been wasted.

However, history of science can get rather tiring after a while. I wish Isaac would write one book on science history, and then drop the

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subject. I am more interested in what is going on today. After all, over 90% of all science has been discovered and developed in this century.

Next, a column, as opposed to freelance articles as found in *Analog*, offers a chance to explore subjects of interest in greater depth. The articles can be cascaded, and old material need not be repeated. For example, one of the subjects I'd like to see covered is propulsion systems. One article could deal with basic theory, not too difficult, and the next few could then examine chemical rockets, laser, nuclear pulse, ion, fission pile, fusion drive, solar reflection, and then an article on pure speculation. The last article might examine the relative merits of each.

Other subjects I'd like to see include energy sources, the recent revolution in geology, advances in medicine, and anything and everything that deals with space travel.

In fact, let me make one special plea. It irks me to the core to hear some ignorant fool make a statement like, "What good has the space program done for us. We spent billions for a bunch of rocks." Unfortunately, my tongue ties itself in a knot when I try to destroy him. I would like to see one article that could point out in hard figures how well space has paid off. (Example, weather satellites alone have more than paid for it by saving billions in predicting hurricanes.) I would frame such an article. I would memorize it.

Sigh. In summary, I want to applaud *Galaxy* for A Step Farther Out. With your guidance and Jerry Pournelle's skill, the series can only be a terrific success.

Always your friend, fan, and follower,

Daniel C. Smith

You might also take a look at the August issue of Worlds of IF, *wherein you will find* Torchships Now, *an article dealing with the application of pulse-fusion techniques to reaction drives for space-vehicles. This is the first in a series by Dick Hoagland, who has been, among many other things, Science Advisor to Walter Cronkite. The series is entitled, appropriately enough,* REVOLUTIONS. (*I have been accused by one writer of having a prediliction for "gee whiz" science-articles. I fear his accusation may have a certain basis in fact.*)

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An Editorial Appeal

Commencing with the June issues, *Galaxy* and *Worlds of If* will begin to fully show the results of an entirely new editorial policy. For example, the combined author line-up for June reads like a *Who's Who* of the field: Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Alexei and Cory Panshin, Fred Pohl, Lester del Rey, Mack Reynolds, Fred Saberhagen, James H. Schmitz, Robert Silverberg, Ted Sturgeon, Jack Williamson—and more! No mean list, I think you'll agree.

Check the contents-pages (themselves so changed as to be virtual new features) and you will find several additions.

Galaxy: Forum, a platform for sf and/or science notables who feel they have something important—and interesting!—to convey to the readership; *Interface,* an intermittent series of interviews *cum* thumbnail biographies by Ted Sturgeon (scheduled to begin in July with an interview of Roger Elwood); *Showcase,* (also scheduled for July) a non-verbal feature—a new piece of sf-art by an acknowledged master, which has as its only justification that its creator thinks it's something special. And of course *Bookshelf; Directions* and *Galaxy Stars* will continue to flourish as of yore—more than yore, in fact.

Worlds of If: The Alien Viewpoint, an insider's view of sf. Crusty, hard-bitten, cynical old Dick Geis (Editor/Publisher of *The Alien Critic*) lays it on the line—his opinions are not necessarily those of the management! *Ars Gratia,* much like *Galaxy Showcase,* but for Up-and-Comers; *Future Perfect,* next issue's goodies—at least some of them; *The Editor's Page* in June is devoted to my personal favorite among the many past editors of *Worlds of If.* In future, it will be what the name implies—the editor's page. And, as with *Galaxy,* all the old features will remain in residence.

But all of this takes money, a good deal of it—and the profit motive remains an operant factor in the publishing industry. To

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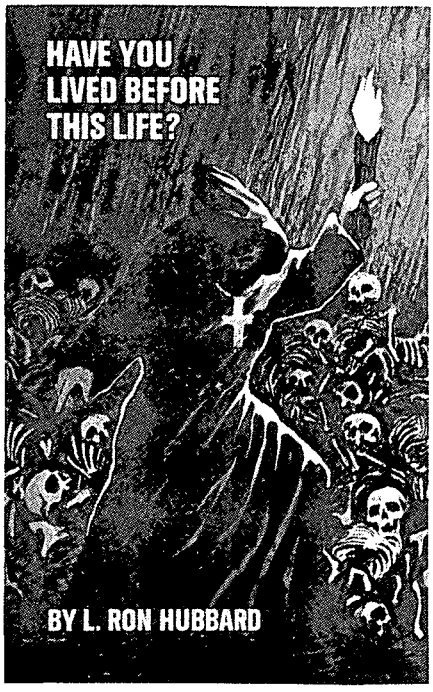

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